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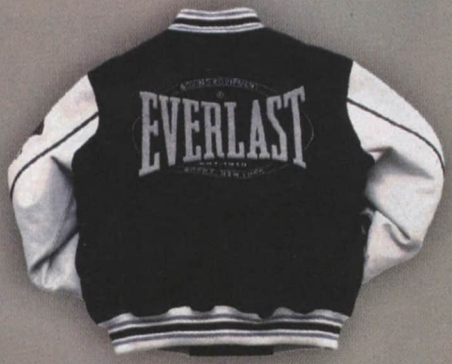

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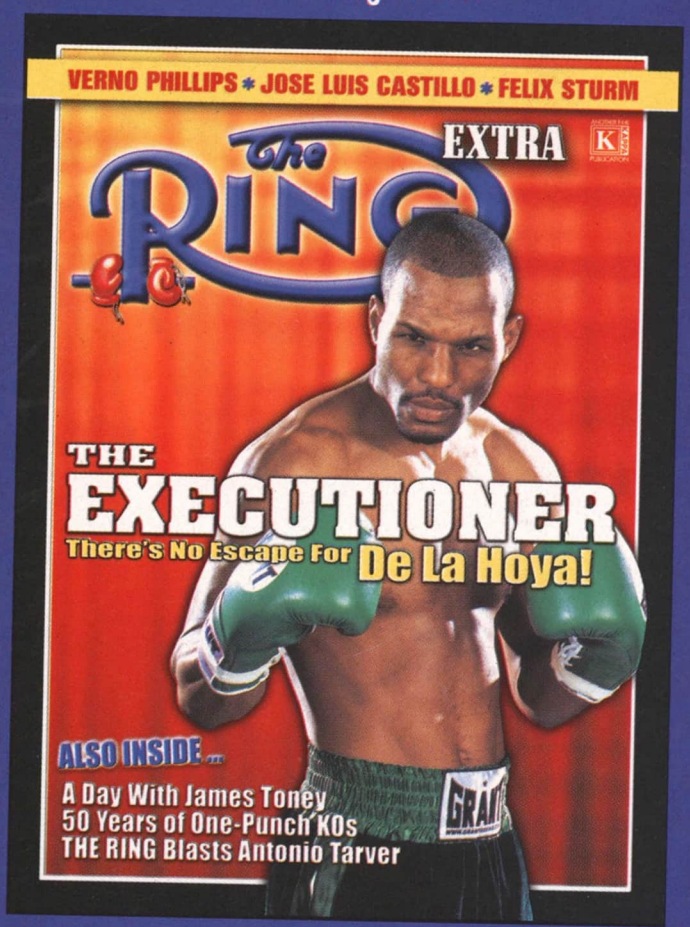

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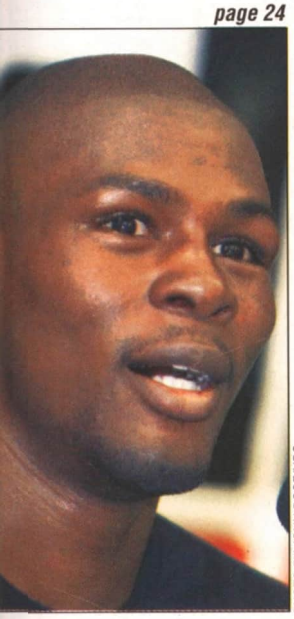

PHOTO BY JOHN BOOZ/HBO

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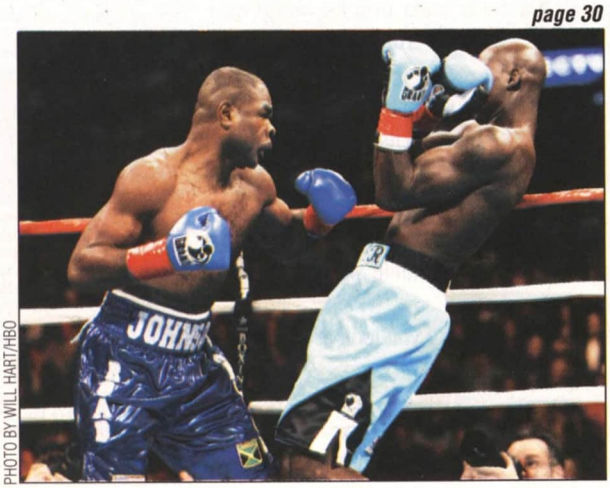

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by Al Bello/Getty Images

Glen Johnson
by Will Hart/HBO

Cover Design:
Jim Malloy

RINGSIDE

As I write this in the waning days of 2004, boxing is poised momentarily between the past and the future. It's too close to the year-end holidays for any more big fights to take place, and too soon for the sport to shift into high gear again. This brief lull in action allows us time to both reflect on what has transpired over the last 12 months and to peer into the future with the sort of skeptical optimism required of all boxing fans.

Much of this issue is dedicated to celebrating the best of '04, a tradition that goes all the way back to 1928 when Gene Tunney was selected as THE RING's first ever Fighter of the Year. Boxing has undergone a lot of changes since then, but there are certain truisms that still apply. But for reasons best blamed on human nature, we tend to overlook some of these time-honored certainties and need reminding from time to time. The past year did an excellent job of reinforcing lessons we should have already learned. For example:

• **Nobody is unbeatable:** Two words say it all: Roy Jones.

• **Talent isn't always the most important thing:** Two more words: Glen Johnson.

• **We don't need the alphabet organizations to have an outstanding fight:** When Antonio Tarver and Johnson ditched their alphabet straps in order to fight each other, it created the best 175-pound title fight in at least a decade. Moreover, the fighters saved hundreds of thousands of dollars in sanctioning fees and struck a mighty blow for THE RING's championship policy.

• **Bigger is seldom better:** The pay-per-view for the rubber match between junior lightweights Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales was sold to approximately 100,000 more homes than the Vitali Klitschko-Danny Williams fight and Don King's November heavyweight extravaganza put together.

• **Boxing consumers aren't stupid:** See above.

On balance, '04 was a good year, featuring numerous fan-friendly fights, and it looks like the trend will continue in '05. As we all know, in boxing, things don't always pan out the way we hope, but there's still plenty to look forward to in the coming months:

• **Johnson-Tarver II:** The contract for their exhilarating first bout had a rematch clause, and both fighters sound amenable to getting it on again in the near future.

• **Bernard Hopkins-Felix Trinidad II:** There will be political problems putting this one together, but if "Tito" didn't come back to seek revenge against "The Executioner," what's the point? Thankfully, this one will create enough money to bring the feuding factions together.

• **Manny Pacquiao-Juan Manuel Marquez II:** Anyone who saw these mighty mites battle to a blood-soaked 12-round draw in '04 can't wait for the rematch, tentatively scheduled for late-February.

• **Marco Antonio Barrera-Erik Morales IV:** We might be getting a bit greedy here, but except for a rematch with Pacquiao, there's not a bigger fight out there for trilogy leader Barrera.

• **Jose Luis Castillo-Diego Corrales:** It doesn't get much better than the world lightweight champion taking on the number-one contender, especially when both are hard-hitters who love to mix it up.

• **Wayne Braithwaite-Jean-Marc Mormeck:** The rescheduled showdown between the number-one and number-two cruiserweights is a very good match in its own right, but will have the added advantage of creating the first cruiserweight champion since THE RING launched its new championship policy.

• **Oscar De La Hoya drops back down to welterweight:** If "The Golden Boy" goes ahead with announced plans to campaign again at this more-suitable weight, he could regain the 147-pound crown and much of his former glory.

So there you have it, a glance back and a peek ahead. Any way you look at it, 2005 figures to be a good time to be a boxing fan.

Nigel Collins
Editor-in-Chief

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Vincent Bellissima
(215) 643-6385
vbellissima@kappapublishing.com

ADVERTISING ASSISTANT
Dianne Weber

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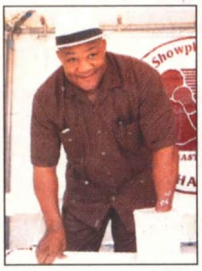
BANQUET OF CHAMPIONS

Reminiscing . . . Livingstone Bramble and Lou Duva share fight stories with Banquet crowd.

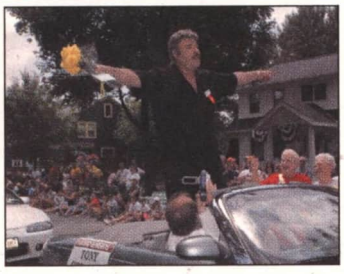
FIST CASTING



Everlasting . . . Fist cast by George Foreman.

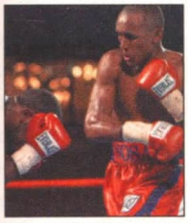
PARADE OF CHAMPIONS

Marvelous . . . Marvin Hagler waves to fans.



Hooray . . . Grand Marshal Tony Orlando enjoys fans along Parade route.

CELEBRITY BOXING NIGHT



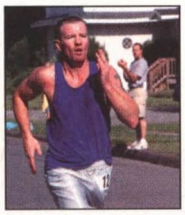
VICTORIANO SOSA

Fight Night . . . Popular boxers featured in action-packed bouts at Turning Stone Casino Resort.

MUSEUM GROUNDS

Autographs . . . George Foreman spends time signing autographs on the Museum grounds.

5K RACE, FUN RUN



Finish Line . . . "Irish" Micky Ward in stride.

Go . . . Ken Norton officially starts race of celebrity boxers and runners.

INDUCTION CEREMONY

A Moment in Time . . . Qawi, Peltz, Nelson, Zaragoza, Palomino, and Christodoulou proudly display their rings.

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GOLF TOURNAMENT

Chip . . . Gerry Cooney (l) chips onto 18th green while Sir Henry Cooper (r) is enroute to next tee.

COCKTAIL PARTY

Stars . . . Boxers and fans enjoy VIP cocktail party reception.

MUSEUM

Carlos Palomino points to his boxing robe on display.

WORKOUT SESSIONS

Antonio Tarver working the heavy bag during a public workout.

RINGSIDE TALKS

Having Fun. . . Frank Bruno and Bert Sugar team up for a ringside lecture.

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ROUND ONE

KHAN-NECTING AMATEURS AND PROS

British boxing's wonder boy, Amir Khan, will box on several shows promoted by Frank Warren this year despite the 18-year-old's decision to stay amateur after winning silver at the Olympic Games in Athens.

In a major overhaul of the sport in Britain, one that will bring the pros and amateurs closer, Khan's magic proved to be the catalyst. The only British boxer to qualify for Athens, the then-17-year-old was one of the stars of the tournament, boxing brilliantly to reach the lightweight final. Only that he encountered the outstanding Cuban, Mario Kindelan, prevented him from returning home with gold. On his arrival back in Bolton, a former mill town in the industrial north of England, he received many offers to turn pro.

"Do I want to sign Amir Khan? Of course I do," Warren declared on announcing a three-year deal with the Amateur Boxing Association. "Do I want him to turn professional right now? I'd like him to have a bit more time in the amateurs first. This is a compromise. I don't think he will stay amateur until the 2008 Olympics in Beijing with the sort of money that is around and given that his stated ambition is to win a world title. But it's for other young amateurs as well as Amir that we're doing this. We will be able to educate the public about the stars of the future, and that can only be good for amateur and professional boxing in this country."

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Khan attacks Evans in first post-Olympics bout

The publicity generated by Khan's success in Athens has significantly boosted boxing's profile in Britain. His first fight after the Olympics, an overpowering victory on points over American Mike Evans, was broadcast live on terrestrial television, prime time by the BBC. Leaders of the local Muslim community described him as "someone who can instill confidence," a unifying force who "has brought the whole community together," while the mayor of Bolton declared that "he and his family have done more for race relations in the town than anyone else in the last 40 years."

Letters come addressed simply to Amir Khan, Olympic silver medalist, Great Britain or Amir Khan, Bolton. From America, Cuba, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Australia. "Amir captured the imagination of people all over the world," said his proud father, Shah. "People just turn up at the house and knock on the door to wish him all the best. There was a guy from Belfast who did that recently and a couple from Scotland. The house isn't hard to find. You just go into the center of Bolton, ask where the boxer lives, and they'll point you to the door."

But Khan's feet remain firmly on the ground.

"It's all been overwhelming," he said. "I mean, I was introduced to the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and he told me that what I achieved at the Olympics was incredible. Then his sons asked to have their picture taken with me! Everybody's been so positive and the opportunity to box on professional shows is great. One day I want to be champion of the world, and every day that's what I'm working towards."

—Brian Doogan

WHO WILL STAY & WHO WILL GO?

In past year-end awards issues, we've always included a feature story naming five fighters who will keep their titles throughout the new year and five who won't. In recent years, however, as alphabet titles have become increasingly bogus and irrelevant, making predictions about this WBC trinket holder or that IBF bauble owner has grown fairly pointless.

Instead, this year, for the first time, we will zero in on those fighters who stand apart as RING champions—currently, there are eight of them—and make bold prognostications about whether their reigns will endure over the next 12 months:

Vitali Klitschko (heavyweight champ): As vulnerable as he's looked in spots, Dr. K has gotten the job done emphatically in his last three fights, and there isn't a heavyweight in the world who'd be favored against him. Would challengers like Hasim Rahman or James Toney be dangerous? Absolutely. But the 6'7" Klitschko is hitting his stride at age 33, and his chin continues to look steady. **Prognosis: Stay**

Glen Johnson (light heavyweight champ): The year 2004 was a dream that Johnson doesn't want to wake up from, but when he does wake up, he'll see a very tough task in front of him: a rematch with Antonio Tarver. And even if Johnson survives that (about a 50-50 shot), can a controversial decision loss to *somebody* be all that far off? **Prognosis: Go**

Bernard Hopkins (middleweight champ): This one could come down to the wire because of a little pact Hopkins made with his mother. He swore he wouldn't fight past his 41st birthday, which will come on January 15, 2006. So, after two or three fights in '05, it's quite conceivable that he will retire and give up the middleweight crown in November or December. Conceivable. But not likely. **Prognosis: Stay**

Winky Wright (junior middleweight champ): Wright is eyeing a move up to 160 pounds if he can get a fight with Felix Trinidad or Hopkins, but even if those fights come together, he doesn't have to give up his junior middle belt. And there's only one guy at junior middle we'd give a good shot at beating the champ: the energetic and aggressive Kassim Ouma. Is there enough money to convince Wright to take that fight? Probably not. **Prognosis: Stay**

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Tszyu may leave his belt behind in '05

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Will Castillo continue to rule the lightweights?

Cory Spinks (welterweight champ): Spinks already has a tough assignment on tap for February, a rematch with Zab Judah. Their first fight could have gone either way, and the champ was nearly stretched in the final round. Judah's penchant for making mental mistakes, however, should give Spinks the edge again. Where he won't have the edge is in a fight with the fearsome Kostya Tszyu, a bout that could very well come together in '05. **Prognosis: Go**

Kostya Tszyu (junior welterweight champ): As stated above, we like Tszyu to move up to 147 and take Spinks' title, which means he'll say goodbye to the 140-pound strap. Considering that fights with HBO boys Arturo Gatti, Floyd Mayweather, and Miguel Cotto are all going to be difficult to make, it only makes sense. **Prognosis: Go**

Jose Luis Castillo (lightweight champ): We'd love to see him fight number-one contender Diego Corrales in May, and we're picking Castillo if it happens. He beat Juan Lazcano and Joel Casamayor in succession, and don't forget how well the Mexican did against Floyd Mayweather a couple of years ago. **Prognosis: Stay**

Manny Pacquiao (featherweight champ): There are two very good reasons to pick against Pac-Man. There's his scheduled February rematch with Juan Manuel Marquez, a fighter who seemed to have Pacquiao figured out by the end of their May '04 draw. And there's the lure of big money at higher weights against Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales. **Prognosis: Go**

—Eric Raskin

TV FIGHTS OF THE MONTH

DATE	WINNER/LOSER	NETWORK	DIVISION	SIGNIFICANCE	MATCHUP	RESULT
11-26-04	Marco Perez W 8 Ubaldo Hernandez	Telef	l	C-	C+	C+
If Perez missed an uppercut all night, we didn't see it						
11-26-04	Jose Aguirre W 10 Kermin Guardia	Telef	jfl	B	B	C-
Note to Guardia: If you don't want to start fighting until the eighth round, you're going to have to start fighting 25-rounders						
11-27-04	Ivan Calderon W 12 Carlos Fajardo	PPV	s	B	C	C-
Calderon so good at what he does it hardly matters that he can't knock anyone out						
11-27-04	Oscar Larios W 12 Nedal Hussein	PPV	jf	A-	B+	C+
Larios' frenetic workrate too much for harried Hussein						
11-27-04	Rafael Marquez KO 8 Mauricio Pastrana	PPV	b	A-	C+	B
If you want to call Pastrana's chin among the best in the game, we won't argue with you; impressive stoppage						
11-27-04	Marco Antonio Barrera W 12 Erik Morales	PPV	jl	A+	A+	A
Trilogy, schmilogy; we want another one						
12-3-04	Martin Castillo W 12 Alexander Munoz	Telef	jb	A	A-	C+
Hey, who says these "interim" titleholders can't fight? Munoz outclassed from bell to bell						
12-3-04	Sergei Liakhovich W 10 Dominick Guinn	ESPN2	h	B-	B	B-
Liakhovich nothing great, but you have to punch once in a while to beat him; he's funny that way						
12-3-04	Rocky Juarez KO 2 Guty Espadas	ESPN2	f	B	C-	C+
How scary is it that as good as Juarez is, he's at least still a full level or two below the best guys in the division?						
12-4-04	Samuel Peter KO 2 Jeremy Williams	Show	h	C+	B-	B-
Ouch						
12-4-04	Jeff Lacy W 12 Omar Sheika	Show	sm	A-	C+	B
If you were shocked at how much Sheika was in this, you're not alone; good fight						
12-4-04	**Jose Luis Castillo W 12 Joel Casamayor**	**Show**	**World l**	**A**	**A-**	**B-**
Castillo ought to be in the top 12 of everyone's pound-for-pound list by now						
12-4-04	Jermain Taylor W 12 William Joppy	HBO	m	B+	C	D-
When did Joppy forget how to throw a right hand? This was embarrassing						
12-9-04	Michael Moorer KO 9 Vassiliy Jirov	FOXSN	h	C+	B	B-
Not a bad win for Moorer, but why did Jirov suddenly decide to stop moving and lay inside with him?						
12-11-04	Carlos Hernandez W 10 Juan Carlos Ramirez	PPV	l	B-	B-	B
Has either of these guys ever been in an easy fight?						
12-11-04	Carlos Navarro KO 11 Agapito Sanchez	PPV	jl	C+	C+	C+
Sanchez as tough as they come, but two weight divisions and Navarro's punch too much even for him						
12-11-04	Miguel Cotto KO 6 Randall Bailey	PPV	jw	A-	B	B-
Proof that a very good boxer-puncher beats a very good puncher every time; Cotto near perfect						
12-11-04	**Vitali Klitschko KO 8 Danny Williams**	**PPV**	**World h**	**A+**	**C+**	**C+**
Don't mistake Klitschko's awkwardness for weakness; he's going to be very hard to beat						

Category Explanation: "Significance"—The importance of the bout to the division and the fighters' futures; "Matchup"—The quality of the fighters and the prefight determination of how their styles will mesh; "Result"—How the bout turned out, from the viewer's perspective.

(RING championship fights in **bold** type)

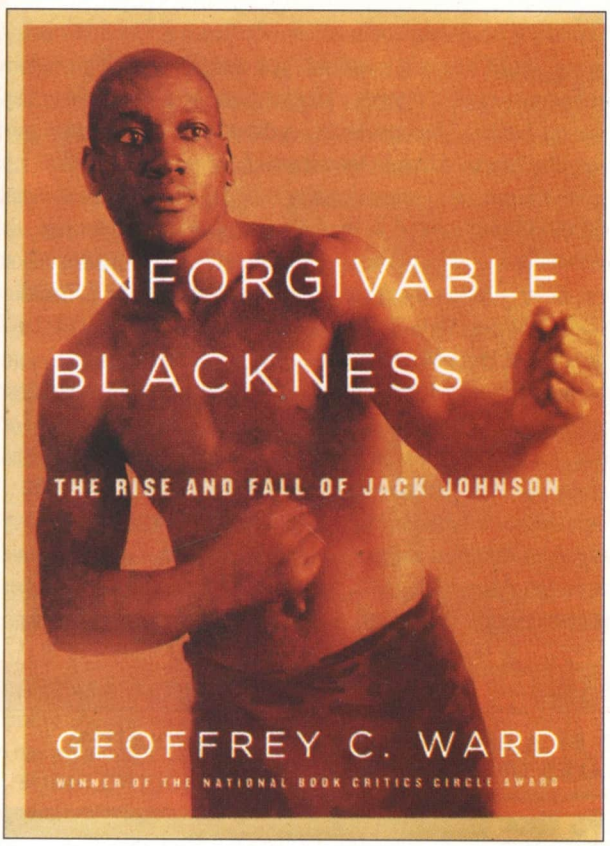
Division key: h—heavyweight; c—cruiserweight; lh—light heavyweight; sm—super middleweight; m—middleweight; jm—junior middleweight; w—welterweight; jw—junior welterweight; l—lightweight; jl—junior lightweight; f—featherweight; jf—junior featherweight; b—bantamweight; jb—junior bantamweight; fl—flyweight; jfl—junior flyweight; s—strawweight

Network key: PPV—Pay-Per-View; Show—Showtime; FOXSN—Fox Sports Net; Uni—Univision; Telef—Telefutura; Telem—Telemundo; HBO L—HBO Latino

THE BOXING BOOKSHELF

As I write this, PBS had not yet aired the much-anticipated Ken Burns documentary on former heavyweight champion Jack Johnson, and if the old bromide about a picture being worth a thousand words is true, the three-hour documentary figures to knock the socks off its companion book, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise And Fall Of Jack Johnson* (Knopf, 492 pages, hardcover, $26.95). But I'll be surprised if it's as one-sided as the hated Johnson's 1910 "Battle Of The Century" against Great White Hope Jim Jeffries, because the tome by Geoffrey C. Ward is a stunning piece of work in its own right and the best bio of the first African-American heavyweight champion written to date.

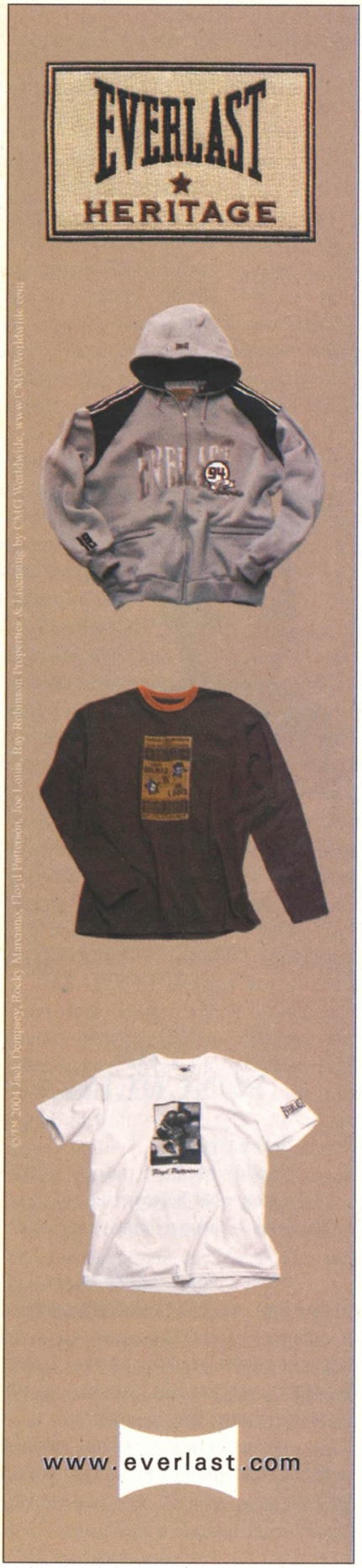
Both fistically and in complexity of personality, Johnson in his own way towered over every other man who ever claimed the greatest title in sports. What mattered most to people, of course, was the color of his skin, although as Ward points out, "It was not Johnson's race alone that inspired such hatred. It is hard to know how the white public would have reacted if, say, Sam Langford or Joe Jeannette or some other more acquiescent black fighter had won the title. Johnson had proved not only that he could beat a white man—but that he could take the women who they believed were theirs alone, as well. It was this lack of deference toward white men and the power they wielded, his refusal ever to remain in the 'place' to which they insisted his color had permanently assigned him, that so inflamed their passions."



Ward shows all sides of "Li'l Arthur," and every view is fascinating. Now and then an occasional mistake appears—e.g., George "Kid" Lavigne was the lightweight champion, not middleweight; and after a while it seems that Ward himself gets confused about the origins of the many Johnson mistresses and faux wives. But, in sum, this is a biography that in scholarship and presentation ranks right alongside Michael Isenberg's *John L. Sullivan And His America* and Arnold Fields' *James J. Corbett: A Biography Of The Heavyweight Boxing Champion And Popular Theater Headliner* as a seminal look at a boxer whose impact and influence upon his time is hard to overstate.

That any current or future heavyweight champion will ever rate such a glorious literary depiction is unlikely, given that, as Ward quotes W.W. Naughton when Marvin Hart and Jack Root went at it for the title vacated by Jeffries, "The glories of the top notch division have departed and the championship has become largely a county fair proposition." But if I'm wrong, Ward has given their biographers a blue-ribbon standard for which to aim.

—Pete Ehrmann



OUTSIDE THE ROPES

Our old pal **Mike Tyson** was in the news for a couple of different reasons in early-December. First, the *New York Post* quoted an unidentified "friend" of Tyson who said the ex-champ was abusing cocaine and running up debts in Phoenix, Arizona, though it must be noted that both allegations remain unsubstantiated. And about a week later, Tyson was cited on suspicion of felony criminal damage after allegedly jumping on the hood of a car outside of a Phoenix nightclub and causing $1,400 damage. The next day, the owner of the car, **Asaf Alikadic**, said he would not press civil charges, but Tyson may still face criminal charges … Former lightweight titlist **Paul Spadafora** was also in the news in connection with cocaine in December. Just days before beginning his trial on attempted homicide and aggravated assault charges, Spadafora tested positive for the drug in a urine test, and was taken into custody for violating the terms of his bond … **Senator John McCain's** bill to establish a national boxing commission failed to pass during the final legislative session of the year, meaning McCain and other supporters of the boxing bill will have to start the process again, from the beginning, in 2005 … In early-December, a Nicaraguan court found former welterweight champ **Ricardo Mayorga** innocent of all charges stemming from a September rape accusation … Last issue, we told you that **Bobby Mitchell** and **Thomas Williams** were convicted of sports bribery. In early-December, manager **Robert Mittleman**, who had pleaded guilty to the same counts but aided prosecutors in convicting Mitchell and Williams, received a light sentence of six months of house arrest, three years probation, a $2,000 fine, and 250 hours of community service … Former light heavyweight beltholder **Graciano Rocchigiani** was charged with assault after allegedly punching a taxi driver in Berlin, Germany, in early-December. Rocchigiani, who was said to be under the influence of alcohol, supposedly threw a punch after the cab driver was unable to make change for a large bill … New Jersey boxing commissioner **Larry Hazzard** filed a discrimination suit in early-December against the state attorney general, a state senator, and a former boxing commission chairman. The suit alleges that state senator **William Gormley** agreed to appoint **Peter Harvey** as attorney general in exchange for Harvey naming Gormley's brother, **Gerard Gormley**, chairman of the boxing commission over Hazzard. Gerard Gormley, you may recall, resigned earlier this year amid charges of improperly distributing passes to fights … Mixed results from the world of pay-per-view boxing—but results that indicate boxing fans have good taste. The **Marco Antonio Barrera-Erik Morales** rubber match in November generated approximately 325,000 PPV buys, exceeding the 300,000 buys raked in by their second fight. Meanwhile, the heavyweights couldn't compare with the junior lightweights: Both **Don King's** November extravaganza and the **Vitali Klitschko-Danny Williams** fight in December pulled in about 120,000 buys, extremely disappointing numbers … A ring death to report: Colombian bantamweight **Carlos Meza** passed away in early-December, four days after losing by 12th-round knockout against **Ricardo Cordoba** in Colon City, Panama. Meza, 8-1 (7), suffered a cerebral hematoma and massive hemorrhage and fell into a coma. He was 26 … South Africa's **George Hunter**, the 1948 Olympic light heavyweight gold medalist and winner of the Val Barker Cup, died in mid-December at age 77 due to complications following a prostate gland operation. Hunter compiled a 13-6 (6) record in his brief pro career.

Mayorga: Cleared of rape charges

Hazzard: Suing for discrimination

THE PUNCHLINES

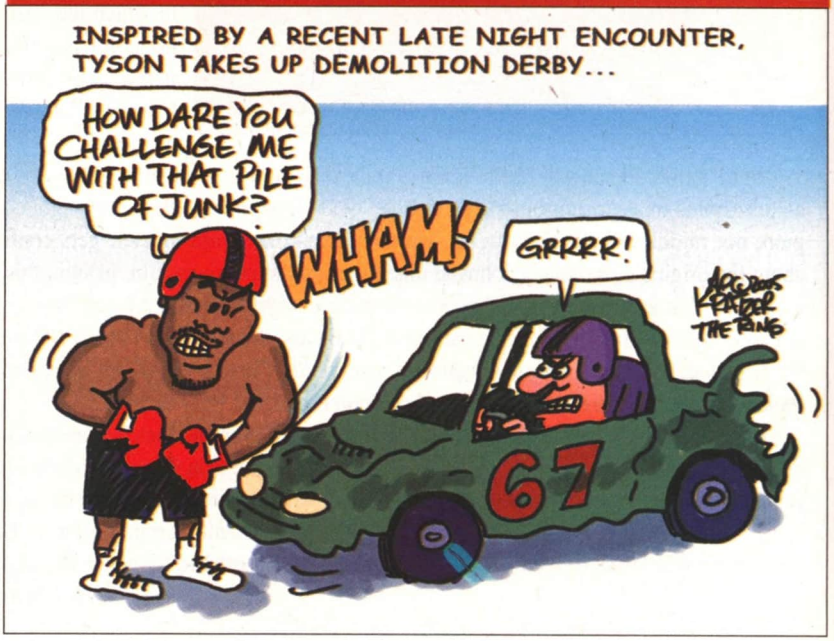
"Nuts and guts."

—Buddy McGirt, trainer of Antonio Tarver, on what he expected Tarver opponent Glen Johnson to bring to the table

"When I retired, all the B-class fighters like Chris Byrd and Hasim Rahman suddenly became A-class. Those two may be able to give [Vitali] Klitschko a decent contest. But what he really needs is someone tall and good. I wonder who that could be?"

—Lennox Lewis, dropping his first hints that his retirement might not be permanent

AL KRATZER'S VIEW



The RING
"THE BIBLE OF BOXING"

RATINGS ANALYSIS

POUND-FOR-POUND

1. **BERNARD HOPKINS**
   Middleweight
2. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
   Junior Welterweight
3. **KOSTYA TSZYU**
   Junior Welterweight
4. **WINKY WRIGHT**
   Junior Middleweight
5. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
   Featherweight
6. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ**
   Featherweight
7. **MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA**
   Junior Lightweight
8. **ERIK MORALES**
   Junior Lightweight
9. **GLEN JOHNSON**
   Light Heavyweight
10. **ANTONIO TARVER**
    Light Heavyweight

(For period ended December 20, 2004)

HEAVYWEIGHTS: Following his one-sided drubbing at the hands of champ Vitali Klitschko, Danny Williams (ninth last issue) exits. He's replaced at number nine by Corrie Sanders, who has ended a brief retirement and returned to action.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: No changes.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: Thanks to a split decision victory over defending champ Antonio Tarver, Glen Johnson ascends to the position of champion, while Tarver slips to Johnson's former spot as number-one contender.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Jeff Lacy (eighth last issue) climbs two spots after a hard-earned win over Omar Sheika, passing Mads Larsen, who falls from sixth to seventh, and Robin Reid, who drops from seventh to eighth. Larsen has actually been inactive for more than a year, but is given reprieve and remains in the rankings because he has a legitimate excuse: a training injury.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: By handily beating worn-down William Joppy, Jermain Taylor rises from seventh to fifth, just ahead of Robert Allen, who slips from fifth to sixth. Joppy (sixth last issue) barely stays in the rankings, dropping to number 10. His decline allows Maselino Masoe, Kingsley Ikeke, and Sam Soliman to advance one spot each.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Division mainstay Fernando Vargas (fifth last issue) finally exits due to inactivity, having been out of action for a full year—plus having announced he doesn't expect to make 154 pounds ever again. That allows everyone below Vargas to move up one position, while making room for Alejandro Garcia to return at number 10.

WELTERWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: No changes.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: After losing narrowly to world champion Jose Luis Castillo, Joel Casamayor, previously ranked at 130 pounds, enters at number two. Everybody below drops one spot as a result, and Isaac Hlatshwayo gets bumped from the 10th position.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: The exit of Casamayor (third last issue) means everyone below moves up a notch. Mzonke Fana returns at number 10.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Based on his impressive second-round kayo of Guty Espadas, Rocky Juarez climbs one spot from fifth to fourth, trading places with Manuel Medina.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: No changes.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: Bit of a shakeup here, with Martin Castillo (eighth last issue) handily outpointing Alexander Munoz (second last issue). Castillo soars to Munoz' old position, and Munoz goes down to fifth. Meanwhile, Mark Johnson, Masamori Tokuyama, and Fernando Montiel each dip one spot to accommodate Castillo's elevation.

FLYWEIGHTS: Another shakeup: Vic Darchinyan (eighth last issue) upset long-reigning titlist Irene Pacheco (third last issue), meaning the new strapholder moves to number three, while the dethroned Colombian drops to fifth. As a result of Darchinyan's move up, Omar Narvaez, Rosendo Alvarez, and Brahim Asloum all go down a spot. Also, on the strength of a meaningful kayo win over Angel Priolo, Brian Viloria enters at number 10, replacing less proven Luis Maldonado.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: No changes.

STRAWWEIGHTS: Changes result from Isaac Bustos' highly inconclusive victory over Eagle Kyowa (Bustos won when Eagle dislocated his shoulder in the fourth round). Bustos moves up from eighth to fifth, while Eagle (second last issue) settles in at number six, directly below Bustos. Due to those changes, Muhammad Rachman, Daniel Reyes, and Ivan Calderon all advance one position, and Juan Landaeta and Chana Porpaoin both drop a spot.

POUND-FOR-POUND: Tarver (third last issue) plummets after his close loss to Johnson, allowing Tszyu, Wright, Pacquiao, Marquez, Barrera, and Morales to climb one spot each. Johnson and Tarver now round out the top 10, with the new light heavy champ entering at number nine, and Tarver slotting in at 10th. To make room for Johnson's entry, injury plagued James Toney (10th last issue) exits. ■

THE RING RATINGS

For Period Ended December 20, 2004

PHOTO BY SUMIO YAMADA

Martin Castillo rose to number two at junior bantam by defeating Alexander Munoz

How Our Ratings Are Compiled

Fighters recognized as champions by THE RING are rated at the top of their division, with the top 10 contenders listed below.

Championship vacancies can be filled by winning a box-off between THE RING'S number-one and number-two contenders, or, in certain instances, a box-off between our number-one and number-three contenders.

The only three occasions when a fighter will lose his championship status are when he retires, moves to another weight division, or is defeated in a championship bout.

Ratings By The Editors

HEAVYWEIGHTS
Weight Unlimited

Champ: VITALI KLITSCHKO
Ukraine 35-2 (34)

1. **CHRIS BYRD** Flint, MI 38-2-1 (20)
2. **JOHN RUIZ** Methuen, MA 41-5-1 (28)
3. **HASIM RAHMAN** Baltimore, MD 40-5-1 (33)
4. **JAMES TONEY** Ann Arbor, MI 68-4-2 (43)
5. **MONTE BARRETT** Queens, NY 30-3 (16)
6. **ANDREW GOLOTA** Poland 38-5-1 (31)
7. **FRES OQUENDO** Puerto Rico 24-3 (15)
8. **JAMEEL McCLINE** Port Jefferson, NY 31-4-1 (19)
9. **CORRIE SANDERS** South Africa 40-3 (30)
10. **LAMON BREWSTER** Los Angeles, CA 31-2 (27)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 154 pounds

Champ: WINKY WRIGHT
St. Petersburg, FL 48-3 (25)

1. **KASSIM OUMA** W. Palm Beach, FL 20-1-1 (13)
2. **SHANE MOSLEY** Pomona, CA 39-4 (35)
3. **VERNO PHILLIPS** Aurora, CO 38-9-1 (20)
4. **DANIEL SANTOS** Puerto Rico 29-2-1 (20)
5. **TRAVIS SIMMS** Norwalk, CT 24-0 (18)
6. **JAVIER CASTILLEJO** Spain 58-5 (40)
7. **RODNEY JONES** Lafayette, LA 34-3 (22)
8. **KOFI JANTUAH** Las Vegas, NV 28-1 (18)
9. **BRONCO McKART** Monroe, MI 47-6 (31)
10. **ALEJANDRO GARCIA** Mexico 28-1 (28)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 126 pounds

Champ: MANNY PACQUIAO
Philippines 39-2-2 (30)

1. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ** Mexico 43-2-1 (33)
2. **SCOTT HARRISON** Scotland 23-2-1 (13)
3. **INJIN CHI** South Korea 29-2-1 (18)
4. **ROCKY JUAREZ** Houston, TX 22-0 (15)
5. **MANUEL MEDINA** Mexico 63-14 (29)
6. **ZAHIR RAHEEM** Tulsa, OK 25-1 (15)
7. **MICHAEL BRODIE** England 35-2-1 (23)
8. **CHRIS JOHN** Indonesia 34-0-1 (19)
9. **SPEND ABAZI** Denmark 31-1 (10)
10. **NICKY COOK** England 24-0 (14)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 122 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **OSCAR LARIOS** Mexico 54-3-1 (35)
2. **MAHYAR MONSHIPOUR** France 26-2-2 (17)
3. **ISRAEL VAZQUEZ** Mexico 36-3 (27)
4. **JOAN GUZMAN** Dominican Republic 22-0 (17)
5. **JOSE LUIS VALBUENA** Venezuela 24-3-1 (14)
6. **JORGE LACIERVA** Mexico 26-5-5 (18)
7. **SALIM MEDJKOUNE** France 43-5-1 (21)
8. **YODDAMRONG SITHYODTHONG** Thailand 40-2-1 (18)
9. **ART SIMONYAN** Glendale, CA 14-0-1 (7)
10. **DANIEL PONCE DELEON** Mexico 22-0 (21)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 118 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **RAFAEL MARQUEZ** Mexico 33-3 (30)
2. **VEERAPOL SAHAPROM** Thailand 46-1-2 (32)
3. **RATANACHAI VORAPIN** Thailand 58-8 (39)
4. **GENARO GARCIA** Mexico 32-4 (20)
5. **CRUZ CARBAJAL** Mexico 24-12-1 (20)
6. **TOSHIAKI NISHIOKA** Japan 24-4-3 (14)
7. **SILENCE MABUZA** South Africa 17-0 (15)
8. **RICARDO VARGAS** Mexico 36-10-3 (11)
9. **JHONNY GONZALEZ** Mexico 26-4 (24)
10. **JULIO ZARATE** Mexico 21-2-1 (13)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 200 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **WAYNE BRAITHWAITE**
   Guyana 21-0 (17)
2. **JEAN-MARC MORMECK**
   France 30-2 (21)
3. **JOHNNY NELSON**
   England 44-12-2 (29)
4. **O'NEIL BELL**
   Atlanta, GA 23-1-1 (22)
5. **KELVIN DAVIS**
   Reno, NV 21-2-1 (16)
6. **CARL THOMPSON**
   England 33-6 (25)
7. **STEVE CUNNINGHAM**
   Philadelphia, PA 16-0 (9)
8. **VIRGIL HILL**
   Bismarck, ND 49-5 (23)
9. **DALE BROWN**
   Canada 32-3-1 (20)
10. **PIETRO AURINO**
    Italy 31-2 (14)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 175 pounds

Champ: GLEN JOHNSON
Miami, FL 42-9-2 (28)

1. **ANTONIO TARVER**
   Orlando, FL 22-3 (18)
2. **ZSOLT ERDEI**
   Hungary 21-0 (13)
3. **ROY JONES**
   Pensacola, FL 49-3 (38)
4. **JULIO GONZALEZ**
   Huntington Beach, CA 37-2 (23)
5. **DARIUSZ MICHALCZEWSKI**
   Germany 48-1 (38)
6. **CLINTON WOODS**
   England 36-3-1 (22)
7. **FABRICE TIOZZO**
   Franco 46-2 (30)
8. **PAUL BRIGGS**
   Australia 23-1 (17)
9. **THOMAS ULRICH**
   Germany 27-1 (19)
10. **RICO HOYE**
    Detroit, MI 18-0 (14)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 168 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **JOE CALZAGHE**
   Wales 38-0 (30)
2. **MIKKEL KESSLER**
   Denmark 35-0 (27)
3. **ANTHONY MUNDINE**
   Australia 22-2 (17)
4. **ANTWUN ECHOLS**
   Davenport, IA 31-5-1 (27)
5. **DANNY GREEN**
   Australia 19-1 (18)
6. **JEFF LACY**
   St. Petersburg, FL 18-0 (14)
7. **MADS LARSEN**
   Denmark 45-2 (37)
8. **ROBIN REID**
   England 37-4-1 (27)
9. **MARKUS BEYER**
   Germany 31-2 (12)
10. **MANNY SIACA**
    Puerto Rico 18-5 (16)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 160 pounds

Champ: BERNARD HOPKINS
Philadelphia, PA 45-2-1 (32)

1. **HOWARD EASTMAN**
   England 40-1 (35)
2. **OSCAR DE LA HOYA**
   Los Angeles, CA 37-4 (29)
3. **FELIX STURM**
   Germany 22-1 (10)
4. **FELIX TRINIDAD**
   Puerto Rico 42-1 (35)
5. **JERMAIN TAYLOR**
   Little Rock, AR 22-0 (16)
6. **ROBERT ALLEN**
   Atlanta, GA 36-5 (27)
7. **MASELINO MASOE**
   New Zealand 26-2 (25)
8. **KINGSLEY IKEKE**
   Canada 21-1 (11)
9. **SAM SOLIMAN**
   Australia 29-7 (11)
10. **WILLIAM JOPPY**
    Washington, D.C. 34-4-1 (25)

WELTERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 147 pounds

Champ: CORY SPINKS
St. Louis, MO 34-2 (11)

1. **ANTONIO MARGARITO**
   Mexico 30-4 (21)
2. **ZAB JUDAH**
   Brooklyn, NY 32-2 (23)
3. **THOMAS DAMGAARD**
   Denmark 34-0 (26)
4. **MICHELE PICCIRILLO**
   Italy 44-2 (27)
5. **MANUEL GOMEZ**
   Mexico 27-10-1 (19)
6. **KERMIT CINTRON**
   Reading, PA 24-0 (22)
7. **JAWAID KHALIQ**
   England 23-1-1 (13)
8. **CARLOS BALDOMIR**
   Argentina 40-9-6 (12)
9. **TEDDY REID**
   Adelphi, MD 22-6-1 (16)
10. **COSME RIVERA**
    Los Angeles, CA 27-7-2 (19)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 140 pounds

Champ: KOSTYA TSZYU
Australia 31-1 (25)

1. **ARTURO GATTI**
   Jersey City, NJ 38-6 (29)
2. **VIVIAN HARRIS**
   Brooklyn, NY 25-1-1 (17)
3. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
   Grand Rapids, MI 32-0 (21)
4. **SHARMBA MITCHELL**
   Washington, D.C. 55-4 (31)
5. **MIGUEL COTTO**
   Puerto Rico 22-0 (18)
6. **RICKY HATTON**
   England 38-0 (28)
7. **DeMARCUS CORLEY**
   Washington, D.C. 29-3-1 (16)
8. **LOVEMORE NDOU**
   Australia 39-7-1 (25)
9. **JESSE JAMES LEIJA**
   San Antonio, TX 47-6-2 (19)
10. **OKTAY URKAL**
    Germany 34-3 (10)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 135 pounds

Champ: JOSE LUIS CASTILLO
Mexico 51-6-1 (45)

1. **DIEGO CORRALES**
   Sacramento, CA 39-2 (32)
2. **JOEL CASAMAYOR**
   Miami, FL 31-3 (19)
3. **JUAN LAZCANO**
   El Paso, TX 33-3-1 (25)
4. **JULIO DIAZ**
   Coachella, CA 30-2 (22)
5. **JUAN DIAZ**
   Houston, TX 26-0 (12)
6. **ACELINO FREITAS**
   Brazil 36-1 (31)
7. **JAVIER JAUREGUI**
   Mexico 48-11-2 (34)
8. **ARTUR GRIGORIAN**
   Uzbekistan 37-1 (23)
9. **JULIEN LORCY**
   France 56-4-2 (41)
10. **LAKVA SIM**
    Mongolia 19-4-1 (16)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 130 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA**
   Mexico 59-4 (41)
2. **ERIK MORALES**
   Mexico 47-2 (34)
3. **JESUS CHAVEZ**
   Mexico 40-3 (28)
4. **YODSANAN NANTHACHAI**
   Thailand 43-2-1 (35)
5. **CARLOS HERNANDEZ**
   Bellflower, CA 41-4-1 (24)
6. **JORGE BARRIOS**
   Argentina 42-2-1 (30)
7. **CASSIUS BALOYI**
   South Africa 30-1 (16)
8. **MIKE ANCHONDO**
   La Puente, CA 25-0 (18)
9. **ROBBIE PEDEN**
   Australia 24-2 (13)
10. **MZONKE FANA**
    South Africa 22-2 (8)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 115 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **KATSUSHIGE KAWASHIMA**
   Japan 27-3 (18)
2. **MARTIN CASTILLO**
   Mexico 27-1 (16)
3. **LUIS PEREZ**
   Nicaragua 22-1 (14)
4. **IVAN HERNANDEZ**
   Mexico 19-0-1 (13)
5. **ALEXANDER MUNOZ**
   Venezuela 25-1 (24)
6. **MARK JOHNSON**
   Washington, D.C. 44-4 (28)
7. **MASAMORI TOKUYAMA**
   North Korea 30-3-1 (8)
8. **FERNANDO MONTIEL**
   Mexico 29-1-1 (23)
9. **FELIX MACHADO**
   Venezuela 22-5-1 (11)
10. **JOSE NAVARRO**
    Los Angeles, CA 21-0 (9)

FLYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 112 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **PONGSAKLEK WONJONGKAM**
   Thailand 54-2 (28)
2. **LORENZO PARRA**
   Venezuela 24-0 (17)
3. **VIC DARCHINYAN**
   Australia 22-0 (17)
4. **MZUKISI SIKALI**
   South Africa 29-4-2 (17)
5. **IRENE PACHECO**
   Colombia 29-1 (22)
6. **OMAR NARVAEZ**
   Argentina 18-0-2 (12)
7. **ROSENDO ALVAREZ**
   Nicaragua 33-2-2 (21)
8. **BRAHIM ASLOUM**
   France 17-0 (6)
9. **HUSSEIN HUSSEIN**
   Australia 26-1 (20)
10. **BRIAN VILORIA**
    Waipahu, HI 16-0 (10)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 108 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **JORGE ARCE**
   Mexico 38-3-1 (28)
2. **VICTOR BURGOS**
   Mexico 37-13-3 (22)
3. **BEIBIS MENDOZA**
   Colombia 29-3 (23)
4. **NELSON DIEPPA**
   Puerto Rico 21-1-2 (12)
5. **PICHIT SIRIWAT**
   Thailand 30-2 (14)
6. **FAHLAN SAKKREERIN**
   Thailand 50-4-2 (20)
7. **JOSE AGUIRRE**
   Mexico 33-2-1 (20)
8. **KERMIN GUARDIA**
   Colombia 35-4 (21)
9. **ULISES SOLIS**
   Mexico 14-1 (10)
10. **ROBERTO VASQUEZ**
    Panama 18-1 (15)

STRAWWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 105 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **YUTAKA NIDA**
   Japan 17-1-3 (8)
2. **MUHAMMAD RACHMAN**
   Indonesia 49-7-3 (21)
3. **DANIEL REYES**
   Colombia 34-2-1 (29)
4. **IVAN CALDERON**
   Puerto Rico 21-0 (4)
5. **ISAAC BUSTOS**
   Mexico 23-6-3 (12)
6. **EAGLE KYOWA**
   Japan 13-1 (5)
7. **JUAN LANDAETA**
   Venezuela 15-3-1 (13)
8. **CHANA PORPAOIN**
   Thailand 51-2-3 (17)
9. **NOEL ARAMBULET**
   Venezuela 20-3-1 (10)
10. **RODEL MAYOL**
    Philippines 19-0 (15)

RYAN OUT LOUD

By Jeff Ryan

THRILLOGY

The adage, "Bad things happen in threes" obviously doesn't apply to Marco Antonio Barrera-Erik Morales fights. In November, the two proud warriors gave a third (and, hopefully, not final) demonstration of why the Mexican prize fighter is one of the Good Lord's finest creations. Twelve more rounds of fury, a total of 1,573 punches thrown, and enough genuine animosity to make the Detroit Pistons' fans and Indiana Pacers players seem like '60s peaceniks communing in Haight-Ashbury. Finally, a high-ticket boxing item that didn't make anyone who bought a seat or ordered pay-per-view that night regret that he'd pulled out his credit card.

Visa Mexico!

Barrera-Morales III, a.k.a. "Once And For All," was a reminder that, in boxing, *good* things often happen in threes. Trilogies are unique to the fight game and have even been making something of a comeback in recent years thanks to our two amigos from south of the border and a couple of happy hookers from the Northeast. For fun, why don't we take a look at some of the more memorable three-peats and see how they rate.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Morales and Barrera mix it up in the final fight of their electrifying trilogy

Because this is a look at trilogies only, great rivalries like Sugar Ray Robinson-Jake LaMotta (six shootouts) and Sandy Saddler-Willie Pep (four meetings) don't make the list. Left off, too, are Bernard Hopkins-Robert Allen I, II, and III. That series of bouts is in a class by itself, so scintillating and historic that writing about it wouldn't leave any space for all of these lesser matchups:

Tony Zale vs. Rocky Graziano: Whenever anyone describes the middleweight ranks as the fistic equivalent of football's "Black-and-Blue Division," a place where hardheaded, hard-hitting, blue-collar laborers toil, they point to this trilogy. It featured three savage wars, three great old-time settings (Yankee Stadium, Chicago Stadium, and Newark's Ruppert Stadium), three brutal knockouts, and two title changes. Both men were down in the first fight, in which a seemingly finished Zale rallied to win in the sixth. In the rematch, a badly busted up Graziano came back to stop Zale in six. Fight III was all Zale, who leveled "The Rock" in the third. **Grade: A**

Graziano lands a right in the second fight of his three-bout classic with Zale

Floyd Patterson vs. Ingemar Johansson: To kayo lovers like me, this was a gift from above. Just like Zale-Graziano, it offered three savage wars, three great old-time settings (Yankee Stadium, the Polo Grounds, and the Miami Beach Convention Center), three brutal knockouts, and two title changes. Oh, yeah, and 13 knockdowns. Patterson crashed a total of nine times yet still managed to win twice. **Grade: A**

Muhammad Ali vs. Joe Frazier: "The Fight" was a matchup of two undefeated heavyweight champions. "The Thrilla In Manila" was one of the most grueling contests in ring history. What keeps Ali-Frazier from getting an A+ is "Superfight II," 12 rounds of Ali's jabbing and holding and Frazier's left hook having no effect. It's ironic that the second meeting was the least spirited of the three fights, because its buildup featured the two combatants wrestling on the floor of a TV studio. **Grade: A**

Ali vs. Ken Norton: It's a significant rivalry because it featured two Hall of Famers and "The Battle Of The Broken Jaw," but it comes up short in a few ways: Only one bout was for a world title, there wasn't a single knockdown in the 39 rounds, all three decisions were disputed to some degree, and the blend of styles resulted in plenty of missed punches and little exciting action. **Grade: C**

Roberto Duran vs. Esteban DeJesus: Forgotten through the years is how much Duran truly despised DeJesus (the Panamanian wasn't fond of Puerto Rican opponents in general). In a non-title bout in '72, DeJesus dropped the lightweight king with a left hook at Madison Square Garden and won a decision that would prove to be Duran's only defeat in a 71-bout stretch. DeJesus floored Duran with the hook again in a rematch in Panama in '74, but wilted in the 100-degree heat and was stopped in the 11th round. The rubber match unfolded in Las Vegas in '78, with "Hands Of Stone" winning by kayo in the 12th. By the way, those two knockdowns Duran suffered would be the only times he'd hit the canvas in his first 82 fights. **Grade: B+**

Duran vs. Sugar Ray Leonard: Only the first fight was great, but the trilogy's story line was compelling. In Montreal, Duran fought the most brilliant battle of his career and handed Leonard his first defeat. In New Orleans, Leonard made boxing's premier bully surrender. Duran-Leonard gets a points deduction on my scorecard, though, because the third meeting, a Leonard decision that came *nine years* after their first two shootouts, was meaningless. By then, the ill will was diminished, Leonard was 33 years old, and Duran was an ancient 38. **Grade: B**

Vinny Paz vs. Greg Haugen: No, they weren't exceptional fighters, but they were two of the best trash-talkers in ring history and they knew how to sell tickets. From the time the contracts were first signed until the moment the final postfight quote was uttered, this trilogy was more fun than any other. Two things hurt its rating: a bad decision in the first fight (Haugen was jobbed) and a third clash that featured Paz on his toes and little of the trench warfare that turned the first two bouts into bloodbaths. **Grade: B-**

Riddick Bowe vs. Evander Holyfield: Great theater. Fight I, one of the classic battles of all-time, featured momentum that shifted more than one of John Kerry's opinions. Fight II will be remembered for an unlikely Holyfield upset and the appearance of a fourth man in the ring: a nut flying in on a parachute. Bowe's knockout of Holyfield in Fight III seems even more impressive today when we realize that the rock-jawed "Real Deal" has been stopped only twice in 48 fights. **Grade: A-**

Arturo Gatti vs. Micky Ward: *Whew!* The entire trilogy unfolded within 386 days, and two of the wars were named THE RING's Fight of the Year ('02 and '03). In the first battle, Ward earned the decision when he decked Gatti with a bodyshot. In the rematch, Ward was floored for the only time in his final six years as a pro. Neither fighter ever stopped punching, trying, or hurting. **Grade: A**

Barrera vs. Morales: Ali-Frazier featured one-sided animosity. Paz and Haugen embellished their dislike to sell seats. But Barrera and Morales *really* can't stand each other. Morales called Barrera a homosexual. Barrera belted Morales at a press conference. The most recent collision ended with the vanquished Morales refusing to shake hands. The big positives: Lots of great punching exchanges, and a grudge carried through three weight classes. The big negatives: Morales' win in I and Barrera's victory in II were controversial. **Grade: B+** ■

Moments after defending the heavyweight championship with an eighth-round knockout of Danny Williams, Klitschko proudly poses in front of the orange banner of Ukrainian presidential candidate Victor Yuschnko. The champ was so upset about the political turmoil in his homeland that he almost cancelled the fight.

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION
VITALI KLITSCHKO
Fighting For More Than Just Himself

By Brian Doogan

PHOTOS BY WILL HART/HBO

Less than two weeks before Vitali Klitschko made an imperious first defense of the world heavyweight title against British challenger Danny Williams, he sat in a room with his brother, Wladimir, his trainer, Fritz Sdunek, and his business manager, Bernd Boente. The subject was politics, and their discussion was intense.

Thousands of miles away from Klitschko's training camp at the La Brea Boxing Club in Los Angeles, where the 33-year-old now lives with his wife and two sons, people poured onto the streets of Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, where fraudulent presidential elections sparked mass demonstrations. Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych had been declared

Klitschko used his punishing left jab to great effect, repeatedly slamming it flush into the challenger's face, gradually turning it into a bloody and swollen mess. The Englishman displayed tremendous courage, but was outpunched 296 to 44, according to CompuBox.

the winner over the pro-Western Ukrainian opposition leader, Viktor Yuschenko. The country (which borders Russia and has such strategic importance in the ideological battle between East and West that Russian President Vladimir Putin actively supported Yanukovych, who wooed the east of the country with pledges to make Russian a second language and to offer dual citizenship) teetered dangerously on the brink of civil war.

"My heart was saying that I should be home," revealed Klitschko, a staunch supporter and confidant of Yuschenko. "I am a sportsman, not a politician. But I am a citizen and not a passive one. I considered very strongly pulling out of my fight with Williams so I could be back with my people in Kiev. After watching on TV the hundreds of thousands demonstrating on the streets, I was ready to fly out of LAX."

Klitschko and his younger brother are the only siblings in the history of heavyweight boxing to be university-educated. Vitali holds a doctorate in sports science and philosophy from the University of Kiev. Both are committed ambassadors for UNESCO, the United Nations body that tackles the problems of underprivileged children all over the world. It is no surprise then that Vitali is so immersed in the politics of his home country and so respected by the men in authority as well as the ordinary man in the street.

"Every morning I was waking up at 6 a.m. to check the news. I did this for an hour before training started, also calling my friends to get further information," Klitschko revealed. "I was afraid every day. My sincere hope was that it would all be resolved in a peaceful way and the message I gave to everybody I spoke to was to remain peaceful, to do this without blood. I understand it all because I grew up in the old Soviet Union. My father was communist. I grew up in Soviet air bases (his father is a colonel in the Ukrainian Air Force), surrounded by the old Soviet Union ideology. All around us was brainwashing, all the time. Now I have spent a lot of time in the West and I know the difference, which is why I wish my country to go the democratic way.

"I have family and friends who live in Ukraine and it was painful to read about what was happening, to see it on the TV and to hear some people talk about Ukraine like it is a poor country, like a banana republic. I wish a great future for my country, for my people, for my children and the next generation, and I support consolidation of Ukraine into the European Union. That is why I support Viktor Yuschenko."

Klitschko's political position was not without risk. Yuschenko was poisoned in the run-up to the disputed second round of the election (which was annulled as fraudulent by the supreme court after reviewing evidence of ballot-rigging and intimidation). Doctors in Vienna confirmed that the 50-year-old had been found with "1,000 times the normal level of dioxin in his body." The Kremlin was accused of ordering the plot, which could have killed Yuschenko. Instead, he became ill and was left badly disfigured but was able to stand in the December 26 re-run of the election. It was Yuschenko who helped convince Klitschko that he would be of more benefit to the cause of democracy by going ahead

Nobody can say that Williams lacked heart. Although he never came close to winning a single round, he never stopped trying. Unfortunately for the big Brit, Klitschko easily avoided most of his punches.

with his December 11 bout at the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas.

"You look at the two things, a world heavyweight title fight, which is my business, and the future of my country, and when you do that you have to think what is best for your people," Klitschko explained. "But I had a call from Viktor Yuschenko and he thanked me for my support and said that I would be more use to the cause as the world heavyweight champion. He told me to stay and do the thing that has already brought a lot of pride to my country at a difficult time. I had to listen to that. I listened also to my trainer and my brother, who flew to Ukraine instead and spent four days there, speaking at rallies, and when he came back he explained the whole situation to me. But I did come very close to breaking camp. Once I decided to stay, however, I was determined that the fight would send a very powerful message to everybody in Ukraine and around the world."

With great ease, this was achieved. Williams, the latest slayer of Mike Tyson, was impotent from the moment he first felt the full force of Klitschko's power—when the echo of the opening bell was still reverberating. Only courage of the highest order sustained the Londoner's challenge into the eighth round. The 31-year-old was outgunned and outclassed throughout an excruciatingly one-sided fight in which

While his jab and straight right have always been major weapons for Klitschko, he used the left hook to greater advantage than usual against Williams. Although still ungainly and somewhat robotic, Klitschko appears to be improving in many regards.

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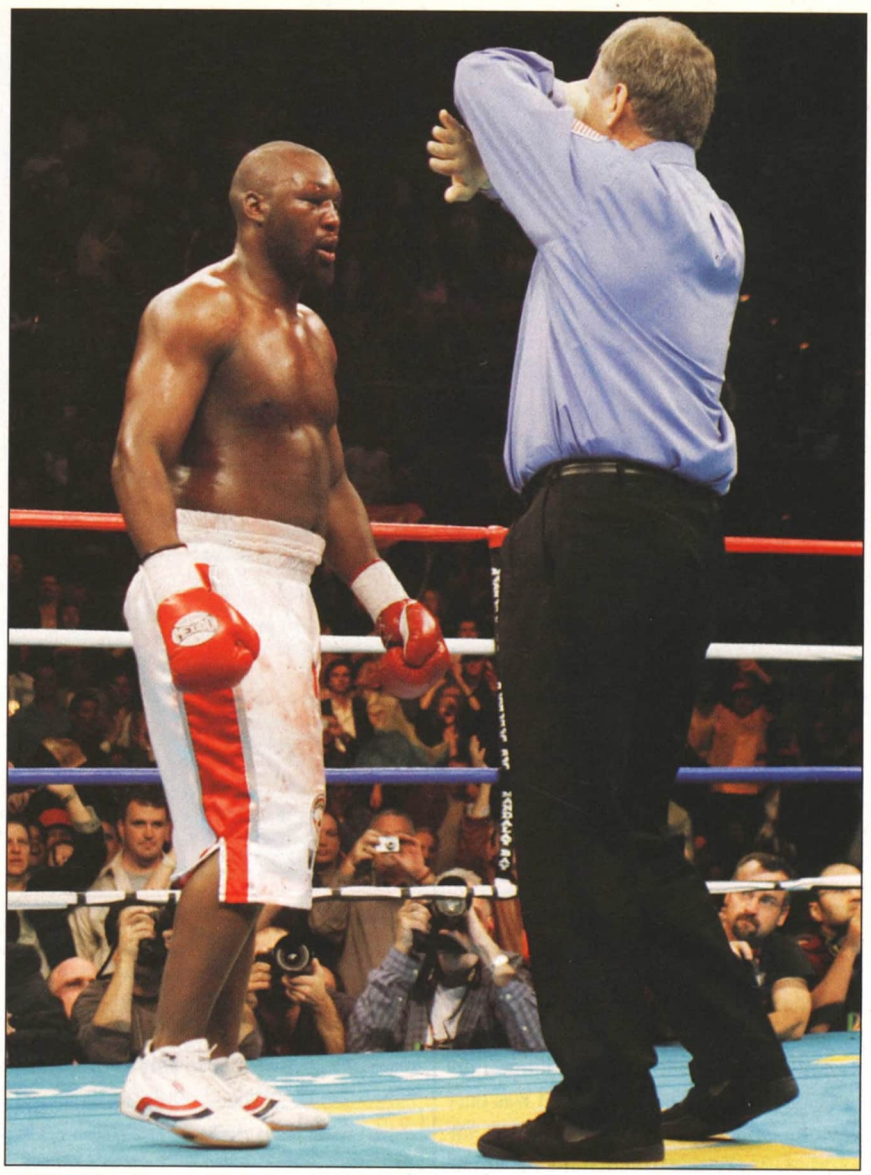


Referee Jay Nady finally rescues Williams in the eighth round. The challenger had been down four times and taken more than enough punishment. "Dr. Iron Fist" said he was surprised by Williams' "iron chin."

Klitschko floored him in four separate rounds, including the final knockdown, which prompted referee Jay Nady, mercifully, to intervene at 1:26 of round eight. Williams, who had been dispatched flat on his back, had climbed back to his feet, testament to his incredible bravery, but the fight had been systematically pummeled out of him every minute of every round.

In truth, it was too one-sided to be deemed a fight. Instead it became almost a ritual punishment of a proud man completely out of his depth at the highest level of heavyweight boxing. He had qualified to challenge the 6'7" champion by beating former champ Tyson in four rounds last July in Louisville. But the Tyson he fought was merely a remnant of the fearsome fighter that once terrorized the division. The present champion is indeed a man capable of being dominant in his day. On the night of December 11, this was painfully emphasized to Williams.

Williams had talked about getting inside the towering champion's long reach, of feinting and moving and whipping in punches inside, like the Tyson of old. He had believed what he said. But when it came to doing it, he was hopelessly exposed. His burning pride, which never diminished under the devastating bombardment administered by the cold, clinical Klitschko, made it all the more pitiful. Finally, he had to be saved from an ordeal he would never have stepped away from willfully: "Rocky Marciano was one of my heroes, so I would never quit."

The opening round was a disaster for Williams, who, at 270, equaled the record set by Primo Carnera for the heaviest participant in a world heavyweight title fight (the combined weight of 520 was a new record). All of his newfound confidence evaporated as soon as Klitschko began to drive his ramrod left jab into his face. The punishment was brutal and frequent. A jab and straight right hand landed by the giant Ukrainian in the opening minute hurt Williams, who staggered under the weight of another left-right combination to his jaw. Klitschko was getting through with powerful blows to Williams' head, while the challenger did not appear able to get close enough to have a chance of retaliating. The six-inch discrepancy in height seemed greater. Williams was forced around the ring like a rag doll.

Before the end of the round, another right hand by Klitschko sent his challenger's legs in four different directions at once before a left hook deposited him on the floor. When Williams got up, there was blood around his right eye and the dream he had visualized in the cool Nevada air in his final weeks of training had degenerated into his worst nightmare.

When the second round began, his legs were still shaky from the abuse he had absorbed in that terrorizing first round. He was eating Klitschko's jab while the wound near to his right eye wept a little more. Somehow he survived, and in the third he even began to get some punches off, landing a left hook and then a right hand to Klitschko's face. But these were glancing blows. Klitschko's punches had the impact of a wrecking ball. When Williams walked into a left hook in the final 10 seconds of the round, he fell to the canvas again, his face a crimson mess, his eyes showing early signs of swelling.

In the fourth and fifth rounds, Klitschko rocked Williams again, making him pay dearly for every mistake. It was all that Williams could manage merely to stay on his feet. By the sixth, this was being acknowledged at ringside as a genuine feat. The challenger attacked for all his worth at the start of round seven, but his crude swings caught mostly thin air. A right uppercut staggered him again, and then he was struck by Klitschko's left, followed by a right to the back of his neck that propelled him to the canvas again, the third knockdown.

The spectacle was barely watchable now. Williams' right eye was almost completely closed as he rose from his stool to start the eighth round. He had sustained an awful beating. Staggered by Klitschko's punches again, he tried to fight back, but his cause was hopeless. A right uppercut by Klitschko and a left, rounded off by a straight right hand to the jaw, put Williams on the floor for the fourth and final time. He rose to his feet, a final act of defiance, but the referee rightly saved him from more certain harm.

"I was surprised by his iron chin," said Klitschko, 35-2 (34), who warred with Lennox Lewis, his predecessor as champion, through six rounds in July 2003, losing only on cuts, before claiming the vacant title with a stoppage of Corrie Sanders last April. "Danny Williams took so many punches. He has a big heart and my respect for him is great. I'm surprised that he never gave up. I'm surprised at how strong his chin was."

Williams, who lost his British and Commonwealth heavyweight titles to journeyman Michael Sprott at the start of the year, but has redeemed himself since, said: "This was for the world heavyweight title and I had to grit my way through it."

But grit was not enough, because the heavyweight division now has a colossus lording over it, an educated man driven by history and fighting to secure a better future for his people.

"It is a big honor for me to hold the RING championship belt and to be the champion of the people," said Klitschko, who flew to Ukraine a couple of days after the fight to campaign for Yuschenko. "For most boxing experts and fans, the world title of boxing's bible, THE RING, is the most highly respected because it is the belt that all the great champions have held throughout history. This title determines the strongest fighter on the planet and it is a great honor for me to be THE RING champion, but also a great responsibility, in the ring and out of it.

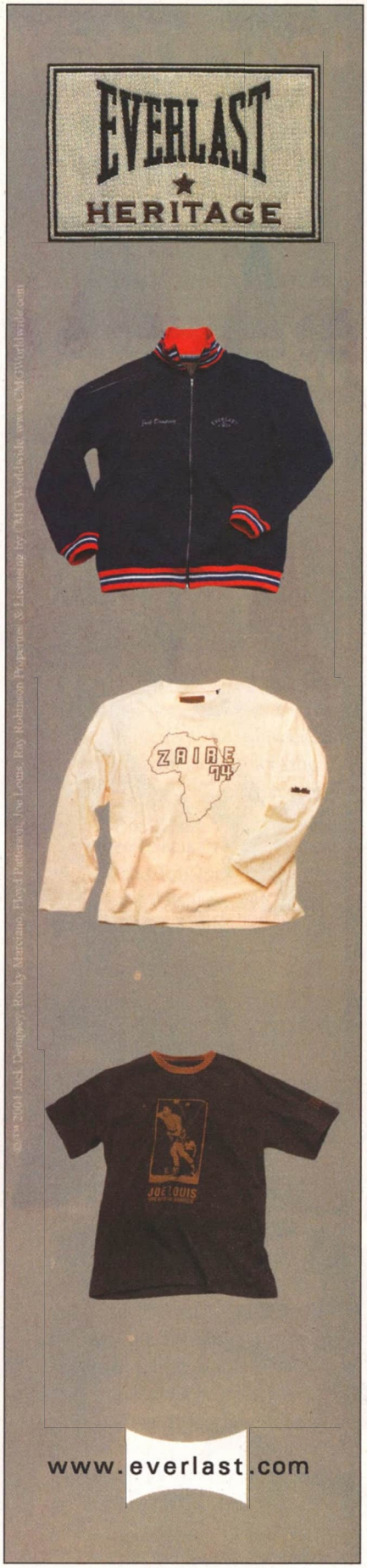
"I think about the future all the time. I try, along with my brother, to be an active part of society. We work on a lot of projects. It is very important that we work with UNESCO, in Project Education for children's needs. We support that everywhere in the world. We have good results in politics and business and we try to use our connections to bring attention to the children who are disadvantaged, children without parents, children who grow up without love. In Ukraine and Russia, this problem is very common. We speak about the children as our future and it is very important that we work for their education.

"In my boxing career, I believe the best is yet to come, and in my country, I am sure we will start to work together to build a better future for all. This is the will of millions of Ukrainian people."

If the will of one is any indication, Ukraine's future will be cemented in democratic ways, though heavyweight boxing promises to be run more like an autocracy. ■

Brian Doogan is THE RING'S European correspondent.

Vitali celebrates with Wladimir after the Williams fight. Like his older brother, Wladimir is very involved in Ukraine politics and was in Kiev for some of the recent demonstrations.



AND THEY'RE OFF!

TAYLOR & LACY

RUN THROUGH THEIR DIVISIONS

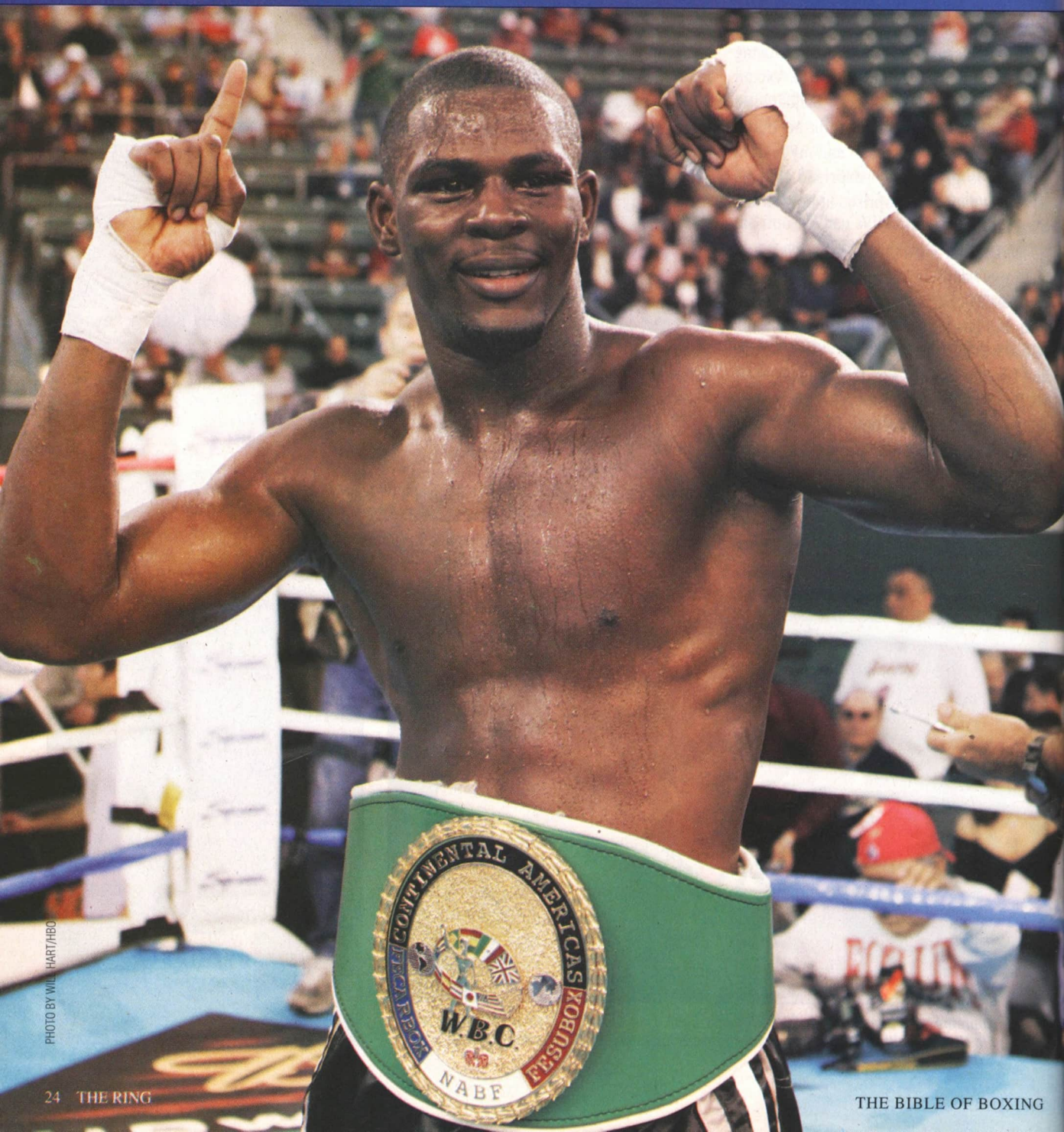


PHOTO BY WILLHART/HBO

By Mike Houser

But Who Has The Lead?

History shows us that the road to boxing greatness is not a 100-meter sprint down a neatly painted track. It's more like a 100-mile cross-country run, winding through rough, mountainous terrain.

Countless are the participants that have begun this course with thoughts of glory and grandeur. But for every Sugar Ray Robinson and Marvelous Marvin Hagler who has completed the run with style, there are countless others who drop out somewhere along the trail, exhausted shells of the person that began the trek.

While 40-year-old undisputed world middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins is racing down the final stretch of his Hall of Fame career, a pair of 2000 United States Olympians in the middleweight vicinity—Jeff Lacy and Jermain Taylor—have begun to separate themselves from the rest of the pack and are making their respective moves in pursuit of immortality.

Both men's progress was captured on camera on December 4. Showtime televised Lacy's first defense of the IBF super middleweight crown, a unanimous, albeit somewhat close, 12-round decision over determined underdog Omar Sheika, while HBO beamed images of Taylor steamrolling his way to a unanimous shutout decision over backpedaling and fading survivor William Joppy.

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

For the 27-year-old Lacy, 18-0 (14) with 1 no-decision, it was an exhibition of the same full-speed-ahead approach that enabled him to become the first from his Olympic team to garner a major title. Lacy looked to launch an assault early against the always tough Sheika, but as in his title-winning effort over Syd "The Jewel" Vanderpool two months earlier, Lacy encountered some early resistance and moderate adversity. He adjusted, however, and ended up looking more like "Right Hand" Lacy instead of "Left Hook" Lacy, rocking the rugged Sheika repeatedly, initiating and finishing the pair's frequent exchanges, and landing the more telling blows.

For his part, the 25-year-old Taylor, 22-0 (16), let Joppy make his move first. The two-time former middleweight strapholder tried to impose his will on the taller Taylor, but after running into some stiff left jabs and strong rights, quickly decided it was time to shift into reverse. Taylor managed to catch up with Joppy long enough to drop him with a left hook in the sixth round, but never looked close to being able to put away the veteran, who was also able to absorb a tremendous beating from Hopkins in his prior fight without being stopped.

If one looks closely enough at the two bouts, it wouldn't be a stretch to say they were a microcosm of Lacy and Taylor's careers.

"There are more unanswered questions than answered ones

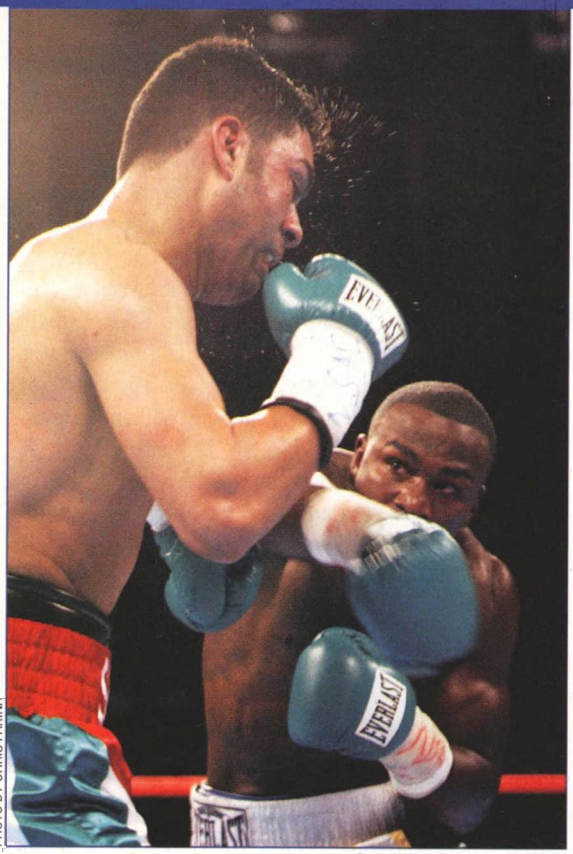


PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

"Left Hook" Lacy shows Omar Sheika that his right hand is also very effective. Lacy decisioned Sheika unanimously in his first defense of the IBF 168-pound belt, but had a tougher time than expected with his gritty challenger.

with Taylor," opined ESPN2 *Friday Night Fights* ringside commentator and trainer Teddy Atlas. "He hasn't been tested yet. He hasn't been in with the kind of fighters that Lacy has."

Whether because of his undeniable skill or because of his relative lack of opposition, Taylor hasn't been in a war yet. And while Joppy was a legitimate middleweight, the same can't be said of several of Taylor's other opponents, such as junior middleweights Grady Brewer (W 8), Rogelio Martinez (KO 7), Alex Bunema (KO 7), and former 154-pound titlist Raul Marquez (KO 9).

Atlas said Taylor, a bronze medalist in Sydney, isn't the first middleweight to face criticism for facing naturally smaller fighters. "It's like that line they used to have on Rocky Graziano," Atlas said. "They'd say Graziano was the best middleweight in the welterweight division."

Even against a natural middleweight like Joppy, Taylor wasn't facing the same fighter who, in the late-1990s, might have been the second best middleweight in the world. Considering the beating Hopkins laid on Joppy, whose swollen face was left resembling a balloon animal after his encounter with "The Executioner," it was generally agreed that even the Joppy of two or three years earlier was just a memory.

Lacy, by contrast, has faced adversity successfully on several occasions and has been in with the superior opposition. Although Bobby Jones wasn't a marquee opponent, Lacy nonetheless overcame a broken hand against him to win over the 10-round distance in 2002. And while one couldn't dispute that Ross "The Boss" Thompson was a blown-up junior middleweight, the muscular Lacy showed he could go 12 rounds against him later in 2002, something he would also do the next year against Richard "The Alien" Grant in spite of suffering a terrible gash over his left eye. The eye swelled up terribly in his following fight, against Donnell Wiggins, but Left Hook closed the show in the eighth round. And in claiming his alphabet belt against Vanderpool, a legitimate top-10 threat, Lacy overcame the best efforts of the Canadian southpaw and pounded his way to another eight-round stoppage.

Even though his progress has thus far outstripped that of Taylor, Lacy still has plenty to prove.

"He's a strong guy who can suddenly end fights with power, but he has moments where he struggles if a guy doesn't come his way, if the guy isn't in front of him," Atlas said of Lacy. "He needs to be more consistent. Against Sheika, he had moments of inconsistency, particularly on the inside. Before increasing his caliber of opposition again, I'd keep him at this point and get him more experience and consistency.

"With Lacy, what you see is what you get. There's not going to be a huge change. Even though Taylor has more questions to answer, his ceiling is a little higher if he fulfills his potential."

Ironically, even though Taylor hasn't been tested as much or faced the same quality fighters as Lacy has, it appears that "Bad Intentions" may have the more ideal set-up for success. Taylor's promoter, Lou DiBella, said his fighter is now ready to test the best the middleweight division has to offer, and, unlike super middleweight, it's a division full of superstars.

"Jermain has proven he's one of the best 160-pounders in the world," DiBella

PHOTO BY JOHN BOOZ/HBO

Taylor smashes William Joppy with a right to the chin en route to a lopsided 12-round decision in Taylor's hometown of Little Rock, Arkansas. Former beltholder Joppy is probably the best opponent Taylor has fought so far, but was well past his prime.

PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

Lacy jabs Syd Vanderpool during the October 2004 bout in which Lacy won the vacant IBF super middleweight strap via eighth-round TKO. Overall, Lacy has fought superior opposition to Taylor.

said. "He's ready for Felix Trinidad, Oscar De La Hoya, or Hopkins."

Even though Hopkins' actions have been hard to predict throughout his career, he has been consistent in his desire to keep his middleweight belts rather than jump at big-money fights with James Toney or Roy Jones at higher weights. The Executioner is also aware of his legacy and may feel the need to dispose of the division's best young gun before hanging up the gloves. Hopkins is cagey, and he may decide that sooner is better than later as far as fighting Taylor is concerned. He may attempt to lure the younger and less experienced Taylor into trying to ascend a steep road he's not quite ready to climb.

From Taylor's vantage point, the temptation to fight Hopkins while The Executioner is on top of his game could be strong. At 6'1", Taylor is as tall as Hopkins and he knows that if he can prevail, his cachet would rise immeasurably and he would find himself in the rarified territory of big fights, big paydays, and establishing his own legend.

"Jermain is charismatic. He's handsome and athletic and just happens to be a professional boxer. That kind of combination works well," said HBO Sports President Ross Greenburg. "Not to sound overblown, but these are the same qualities Muhammad Ali, Sugar Ray Leonard, and Oscar De La Hoya had. I'm sure we'll be able to put together some big fights down the road. Maybe by the fall of 2005 or early-2006—maybe earlier."

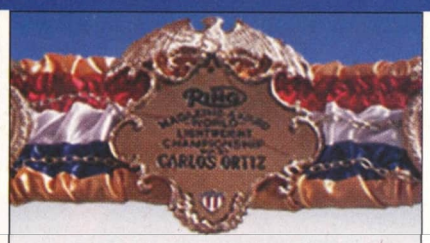
Another route for Taylor to go while he waits for a shot at Hopkins or Trinidad is to take on a Felix Sturm or Howard Eastman, both real tests. But DiBella said Sturm's promoter, Klaus Peter Kohl, has indicated he has no desire to face Taylor unless a belt is at stake. DiBella didn't go out of his way to call out world junior middleweight champion Winky Wright, but he did indicate that potentially rising 154-pounders Fernando Vargas and Shane Mosley would fit in fine with Taylor's schedule.

Unlike Taylor, Lacy has no Hall of Famers waiting in the super middleweight ranks. With Sven Ottke taking his 21 title defenses and unbeaten record with him into retirement, a meeting with THE RING's number-one-ranked 168-pounder Joe Calzaghe is clearly the most meaningful possibility.

When interviewed shortly after facing Sheika, Lacy said he had more than a passing interest in facing Calzaghe.

"I need Joe Calzaghe," Lacy said. "One of the main reasons is before you can be known as the true champion, you want to beat the champion who was there before you. You see he's undefeated and you want to make a statement to the fans."

At 38-0 (30), the southpaw from Wales presents an interesting challenge for Lacy.



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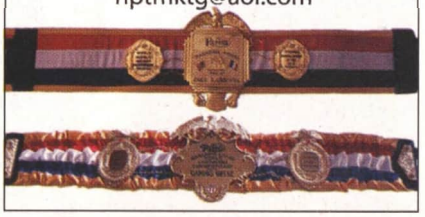

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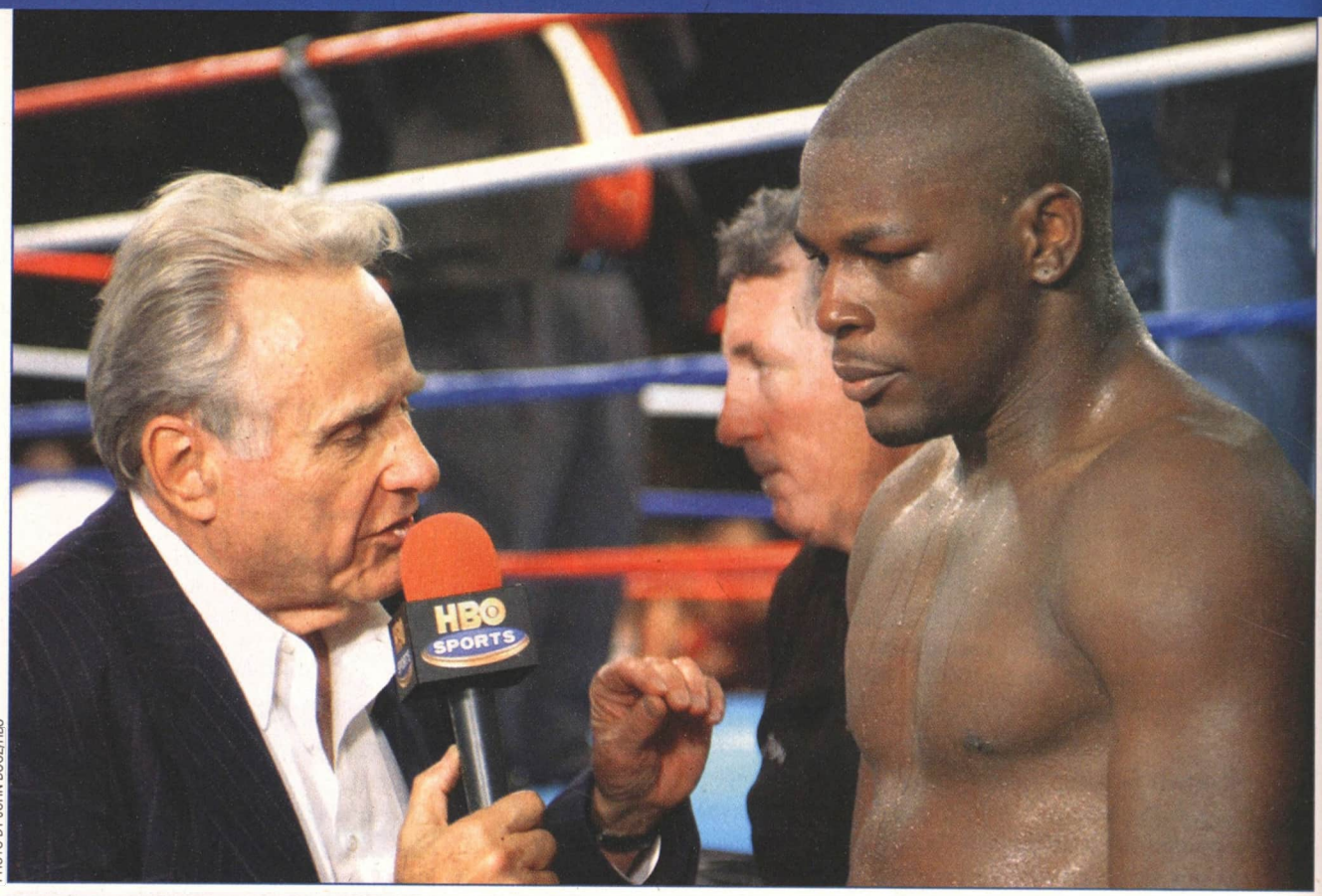


PHOTO BY JOHN BOOZ/HBO

Taylor talks to HBO's Larry Merchant following his victory over Joppy. Ross Greenburg, president of HBO Sports, believes that Taylor's charismatic personality is a big plus and will help him connect with boxing fans. Greenburg expects to see Taylor in a major fight around the end of 2005.

Calzaghe halted Sheika in five rounds, has a convincing win over Charles Brewer, and rose from a knockdown to stop Byron Mitchell. But perhaps the biggest question is whether Lacy can lure the Welshman across the Atlantic.

Gary Shaw, Lacy's promoter, said that although Lacy's next fight would be a mandatory defense against the IBF's top-rated challenger (anonymous Rudy Markussen of Denmark, according to the November '04 rankings), a date with Calzaghe isn't too far up the road for Lacy, assuming his conditions can be met.

"We made an offer to [Calzaghe's promoter] Frank Warren, but you never know how serious Frank is," Shaw said. "He probably only wants to fight over there. In order for me to bring Jeff over there, I'd have to be assured of neutral officials—nobody from over there. And they have to pay us enough to bring Jeff over there—seven figures plus."

If Lacy has problems getting Calzaghe in the ring, there are other decent options for him, including possible slugfests with Danny Green, Antwun Echols, or Anthony Mundine, not to mention unification bouts with beltholders Mikkel Kessler or Markus Beyer.

Shaw also said Lacy is prepared to move up or down in weight for a big-money fight and could meet light heavyweight champ Glen Johnson or even drop down to 160 for Hopkins, Trinidad, or even Taylor himself.

Lacy said he and Taylor have discussed the possibility of meeting each other several times.

"We saw it coming as amateurs," Lacy said. "Although we both laughed it off back then, now it's more of a reality. We both look forward to it. I'm a crowd-pleaser. If that's what the fans want, I'll do it. The fans are who pays our bills. My goal is to be the undisputed super middleweight champion, go to 160 and fight Hopkins or whoever is champion, and then go to 175."

Shaw, DiBella, and Greenburg all said that Lacy-Taylor is viable and could be a pay-per-view event.

"They are the antithesis of each other," Atlas said of Lacy and Taylor. "One likes to fight inside—Lacy—one likes it on the outside—Taylor. The X's and O's are, would Taylor be able to play his strengths to Lacy's weaknesses? Could he fight outside, use his range and good jab, and be able to stay away from Lacy?"

HBO's unofficial fight judge, Harold Lederman, has seen Taylor up close several times and offered his insight on a possible winner.

"Jermain would have to outbox him," Lederman said. "I think he could if he didn't get caught by a big left hook from Lacy. But I think that 90 percent of the guys with big muscles like Lacy tire badly in the late rounds. If Jermain fights a smart fight, doesn't fight on a dime, in a phone booth, go toe-to-toe, I'd take Taylor by 12-round decision."

Both Lacy and Taylor are off to a good start in their footrace to fame and fortune. But the one thing more exciting than a quick start is a photo finish. And if or when that happens, will they be in the same picture? ■

Mike Houser is a boxing writer for the Nevada Appeal and a frequent contributor to this magazine.

YEAR-END SPECTACULAR!

THE BEST OF 2004

Compiled by Nigel Collins, Eric Raskin, & Joe Santoliquito

The Year of the Falling Star. That's how 2004 will be remembered by most within the boxing community, and it only makes sense. Between January and December, Lennox Lewis said goodbye to the sport, while Oscar De La Hoya, Roy Jones, and Mike Tyson all said hello to the canvas. Throw in some next-tier guys like Shane Mosley, Paulie Ayala, Ricardo Mayorga, Fernando Vargas, Acelino Freitas, and Vernon Forrest all taking backward steps of one kind of another, and you can see why so many folks are focusing on the negative.

But here's the good news: For every star that falls, another rises. De La Hoya's demise elevated Bernard Hopkins. Jones' plunge pushed Antonio Tarver and Glen Johnson into the big time. Tyson's latest tumble made Danny Williams a somebody and, combined with the Lewis retirement, indirectly helped Vitali Klitschko reach new heights. Mosley went down, Winky Wright went up. Ayala reached the end, Marco Antonio Barrera enjoyed a new beginning. Freitas said *no mas*, Diego Corrales became *mas macho*. Mayorga took his lumps so that Felix Trinidad could give us all goosebumps. Vargas and Forrest faded into the background, making room for young fighters like Miguel Cotto and Jeff Lacy to step to the fore.

It was a year of change, and in the long run, change usually turns out to be a good thing. What hasn't changed is THE RING's dedication to providing our readers with the most comprehensive look back on the past year that they'll find anywhere.

Just turn one page ahead, and you'll find the answer to the question posed on our cover. You'll also find out what was selected as the Fight, Round, Knockout, Upset, and Event of the Year, plus who took home Comeback of the Year honors. Want to know who's won all these awards over the past decades, dating back as far as 1928? That's in here too. Curious who was the Trainer of the Year, the Female Fighter of the Year, and the owner of the Facial Monstrosity of the Year? You'll get all that as well. And lastly, you'll get our annual Best Fighter Poll, in which a panel of experts tell you who the 10 best pugilists in the world today are.

But enough hyping the package. We know you want to turn that page and find out who the Fighter of the Year was. So what are you still doing on this page? Remember, change is good. So change the page, and enjoy.

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

GLEN JOHNSON

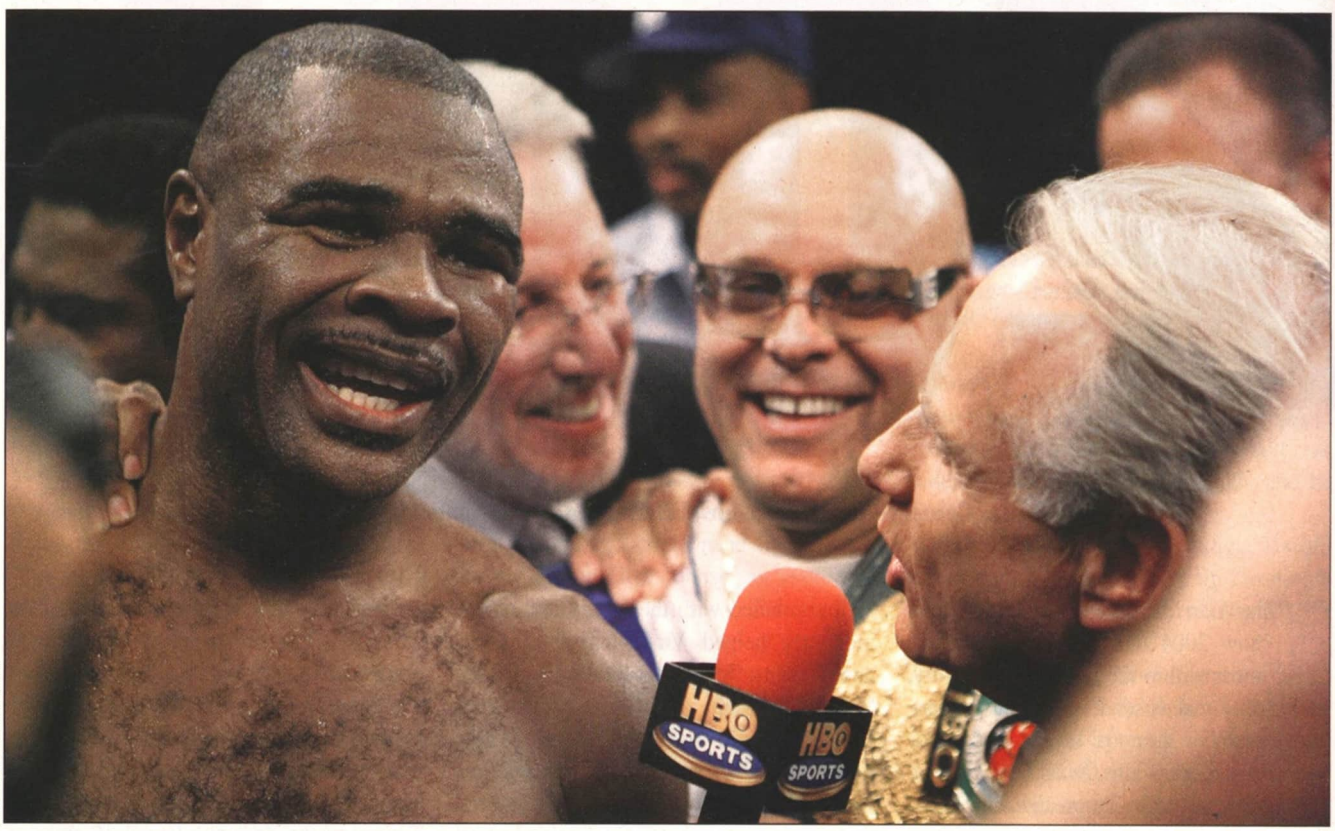


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

A joyous Johnson speaks with HBO's Larry Merchant moments after defeating Tarver. "The Road Warrior" had the kind of year that dreams are made of.

When his corner crew hoisted Glen Johnson up on their shoulders at the conclusion of his upset victories over Roy Jones and Antonio Tarver, he crossed his arms, looked down his broad nose, and surveyed the joyous pandemonium surrounding him. Judging by the look of supreme self-satisfaction on Johnson's face, those moments must have tasted especially sweet after so many nights of bitter disappointment. "The Road Warrior" had found a home at last—at the very pinnacle of the light heavyweight division.

Of course, very few outside of Johnson and his camp expected him to win either bout. Jones and Tarver were stars, Johnson little more than a reliable character actor who finally got a juicy part in a big movie. But win them he did, and therein lays the tale of one of the most unlikely and inspirational success stories in the annals of the ring.

In less than 12 months, the 35-year-old Johnson went from hard-luck journeyman and part-time construction worker to light heavyweight champion of the world. At the beginning of the year, not even Johnson would have predicted the miraculous reversal of fortune that would eventually make him THE RING's 2004 Fighter of the Year.

Johnson's long and obstacle-strewn jour-

ney to this moment began in February '93 when he turned pro in Fort Lauderdale. Thirty-two consecutive victories later, the Jamaican-born fighter would find himself in the ring with IBF middleweight titleholder Bernard Hopkins, who handed him both a boxing lesson and a beating before the fight was stopped in the 11th round. It remains the only one of Johnson's nine losses he readily admits is legitimate.

The defeat to Hopkins started Johnson on a disheartening roller-coaster ride that featured a numbing series of setbacks. Forced to fight on the road in order to eke out a living, Johnson lost almost as many as he won, dropping decisions that ranged from debatable to outright robbery. He lost to Sven Ottke in Germany, Silvio Branco in Italy, and Julio Gonzalez in California. Just as bad, perhaps even worse, were draws with Daniel Judah and Clinton Woods, both of which should have gone to Johnson beyond a shadow of a doubt. Still, even as the injustices mounted, this remarkable man refused to give up.

"It was the drive to become something, you know," said Johnson, his West Indian accent still very much in evidence despite living in the United States for a number of years. "I wasn't willing to accept that I could not have a better life. I wanted to be able to find a way to provide a good living for me and my immediate family. I just couldn't give up on that dream."

This is not to say that Johnson, 42-9-2 (28), was impervious to disappointment. He just never let it beat him.

"I definitely felt crummy many times when they screwed me over," he told THE RING. "Every time they would knock me down, I would feel disappointed and bummed out. But I put it in the back of my head that the sun will rise again tomorrow morning, so what am I going to do? I can't just roll over and live the rest of my life in a crummy little apartment. I couldn't just say, 'Well, I could have done better, but the judges ripped me off.' Not many people are going to listen to that too long. That's when they start walking away, so I still have to get up and do something. So I go back to the gym and start training again and do what I have to do."

Things began to improve when Johnson returned to England for a rematch with Woods, and handed the local lad such a comprehensive beating that the judges had no alternative but to award him the decision and IBF strap. It didn't seem like such a major deal at the time, at least not as far as the big picture was concerned. But all that was about to change.

Hard work and perseverance took Johnson a long way. But in the end, events outside of his control played a significant role in his unlikely ascension, when Tarver knocked out Jones in May '04 to capture the light heavyweight title.

It was a mind-boggling result, and many, including Jones, were in denial. Jones wanted instant redemption, but figured he'd bolster his ego and warm up for a rematch with Tarver by disposing of Johnson first, picking up his IBF belt for good measure. Jones ended up flat on his back, a knockout victim for the second time in four months.

The boxing world was still trying to figure out what had happened to Jones, when Johnson and Tarver agreed to relinquish their

HONORABLE MENTION

At the start of the year, a lot of people thought **Marco Antonio Barrera** was on the skids. He'd been a pro since '89, had been in his share of wars, and would turn 30 on January 17. And who could forget the vicious knockout loss he suffered at the flashing fists of Manny Pacquiao in '03? Even Barrera's 10th-round knockout of Paulie Ayala in June did little to restore his lost prestige, and when a rubber match with arch-rival Erik Morales was signed, "El Terrible" was quickly installed as the favorite. But Barrera fooled the experts and gave an inspired performance, winning a 12-round decision in a terrific fight and reestablishing himself as one of the world's very best fighters.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Barrera digs to Morales' body

Diego Corrales opened the year by winning a hard-fought 12-round split decision over Joel Casamayor, who had controversially stopped "Chico" in '03 when a cut inside of his mouth terminated a see-saw contest. After avenging his loss to the crafty Cuban, Corrales moved up to the lightweight division and stopped previously unbeaten Acelino Freitas to become the number-one contender for 135-pound champion Jose Luis Castillo.

Long-suffering southpaw **Winky Wright** finally had a signature win, decisioning Shane Mosley in March to unify the junior middleweight title and put himself into a significantly higher tax bracket. They fought a rematch in November, with Wright again coming away with the decision.

Although he still has his detractors, **Vitali Klitschko** made considerable headway in '04 toward convincing the boxing world that he is indeed a worthy replacement for Lennox Lewis. First, Klitschko knocked out Corrie Sanders in April to capture the vacant heavyweight title, and then in December, he tallied his first defense by stopping Danny Williams, who was coming off a kayo victory of Mike Tyson.

IBF bantamweight boss **Rafael Marquez** thrice displayed his frightening punching power in '04, blasting out Pete Frissina in January, Heriberto Ruiz in July, and iron-chinned Mauricio Pastrana in November.

Also in the mix were middleweight champion **Bernard Hopkins**, who won the biggest money fight of the year with a relatively easy kayo of Oscar De La Hoya, and **Antonio Tarver**, who still had an outstanding year, becoming the first to stop Jones before losing a close call to Johnson.

alphabet titles rather than fight pointless mandatories, and box each other instead. It was a ballsy political move, but one that made a lot of sense as far as the fans, HBO, and THE RING were concerned, as the two best 175-pounders in the world would be squaring off. The financial upside was also considerable, as both fighters reportedly earned their largest purses to date, $2.5-million for Tarver, and $1.5-million for Johnson.

Their bout turned out to be one of the year's finest fights and clearly the best light heavyweight title bout in recent memory. It featured crowd-pleasing, two-way action in almost every round, and even though a number of media members thought Tarver had an edge, the split decision in Johnson's favor was widely accepted as fair. It was also impossible to deny the poetic justice in Johnson getting the benefit of the doubt when it counted the most.

"To be honest with you, I say thanks to all those judges who gave me bad decisions throughout the years, because they are part of the reason that made me fight the way I fought," said Johnson. "They created the style I fight. They showed me that I couldn't just fight. I have to go above and beyond, and luckily I did that against Tarver, because it was a tough fight and it was an action-packed fight. And I needed a style like that to win."

The editors didn't just jump to an instant and unanimous conclusion when selecting

GLEN JOHNSON: THE YEAR THAT WAS

Talk about a career turnaround: Going into 2004, Johnson had tallied just one victory in his previous five fights, a 12-round decision over Eric Harding. In four other starts, he'd dropped decisions to Derrick Harmon and Julio Gonzalez and fought draws with Daniel Judah and Clinton Woods. If there was a silver lining to the string of bad luck and even worse decisions, it was that the draw with Woods was for the then-vacant IBF light heavyweight title, so a rematch was ordered for early-2004.

Even when Johnson won a unanimous decision over Woods in their second encounter, few would have guessed that the Jamaican veteran would carry on to have such a fantastic year. But beating Woods turned out to be just the start of a year that would see Johnson add victories over the two biggest names in the light heavyweight division. Moreover, his unlikely success proved an inspiration to all the so-called journeymen struggling to overcome the long odds and short pay.

"I have one thing to say to the people out there living a tough life," said Johnson. "Don't ever give up on yourself, because it's the only sure way of losing."

W 12 Clinton Woods, Sheffield, England, February 6, 2004: Although most neutral observers felt Johnson had done enough to win the vacant IBF strap when he fought Woods the first time, in November '03, the official result had been a draw, and Johnson knew he had to be even more impressive to avoid another disappointment.

Therefore, he took the fight to the Englishman from the start, shaking him with a hard overhand right in the second round. Johnson kept the pressure on, staggering Woods again in the fourth with another right and then punishing him with hooks to the body.

Woods managed a mini-rally in the eighth, but the demanding pace had taken a lot out of him, and Johnson finished well on top, punishing his rival with both hands in the 10th and 11th rounds to sew up a unanimous decision by scores of 116-112, 116-113, and 115-113.

"Nobody in boxing has taken the road I did, traveling all over the world fighting everybody, beating them, and then having it taken away from me," said an emotional Johnson. "I've always wanted to save up a college fund for my kids so they can go to college, because I didn't. Winning this title will help me do it."

He didn't know it at the time, but Johnson's earning power had only just begun to elevate. Before the year was over, he'd earn enough money to send all his offspring to college and still have something left over for his sunset years.

KO 9 Roy Jones, Memphis, Tennessee, September 25, 2004: When Jones selected Johnson as his first comeback opponent following his devastating loss to Tarver, his choice was derided as another example of Jones' penchant for picking on easy marks. After all, at that point Johnson's main claim to fame was a decision over Woods, a fighter Jones had stopped in six rounds back in '02. Jones, eager to demonstrate he was still top dog, figured to outclass Johnson en route to a return bout with Tarver.

Naturally, Johnson had other ideas, but even when he pinned Jones on the ropes in the opening round and pounded away for almost the entire three minutes, most figured that he'd soon run out of gas and Jones would take over. It never happened.

Jones, looking like somebody who dearly wished he were elsewhere, never got untracked. He occasionally flashed a dash of the old magic, but Johnson kept coming, grinding away with a steady stream of punches.

It was rapidly becoming obvious to even the most myopic Jones devotees that their hero was in danger of losing a decision, when Johnson suddenly rendered all arithmetic irrelevant. Early in the

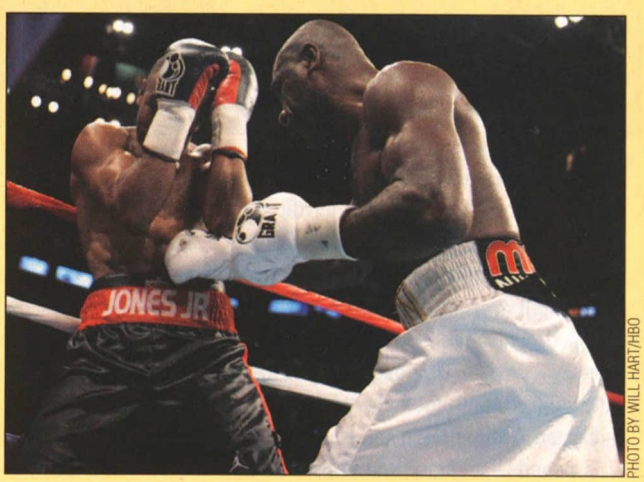


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Jones tries to hide from Johnson's onslaught

Johnson for top honors. It was important to compare Johnson's accomplishments with those of the other candidates:

Thanks to his career-rejuvenating decision over Erik Morales, junior lightweight Marco Antonio Barrera obviously warranted serious consideration, as did lightweight Diego Corrales, due to quality wins over Joel Casamayor and the previously unbeaten Acelino Freitas. Several others were also considered *(see sidebar on page 31)*, but Johnson, Barrera, and Corrales had the strongest cases.

Johnson's only negative was the fact that the decision over Tarver was less than universally agreed upon—even several staff members thought Tarver had done enough to retain the title. But Corrales and Barrera also had minor blemishes. Corrales' decision over Casamayor was also extremely close and of the split variety, and in Barrera's only outing other than his narrow majority nod over Morales, he'd stopped and retired Paulie Ayala, who was past his prime and fighting above his best weight.

In the end, Johnson's extraordinary year shined brightest, an achievement made all the more remarkable by its improbability.

"Can you imagine, coming from where I was two years ago, that I would end up being Fighter of the Year?" said Johnson upon hearing the news. "It's a beautiful thing. I'm feeling real good, man." ■

ninth, as Jones drew back from a jab with his hands low, Johnson stepped in and uncorked a right hand that caught Jones on the temple, stiffened his legs, and sent him crashing down on his back. Jones was out before he hit the floor, where he lay unconscious as referee Bill Clancy counted him out 48 seconds into the round.

Afterward, although the main focus was on Jones' unexpected and unequivocal defeat, Johnson provided a quote that went a long way toward explaining the sort of individual he is: "I'm not the best," he told HBO's Larry Merchant, "I'm just a guy who's willing to fight the best."

Perhaps the most stunned person among the 13,043 in attendance at the FedEx Forum—besides Jones, of course—was Tarver, who was rooting for Jones to win and set up a lucrative rubber match between them. Instead, he had to settle for a showdown with Johnson, which would ultimately lead to an even bigger disappointment.

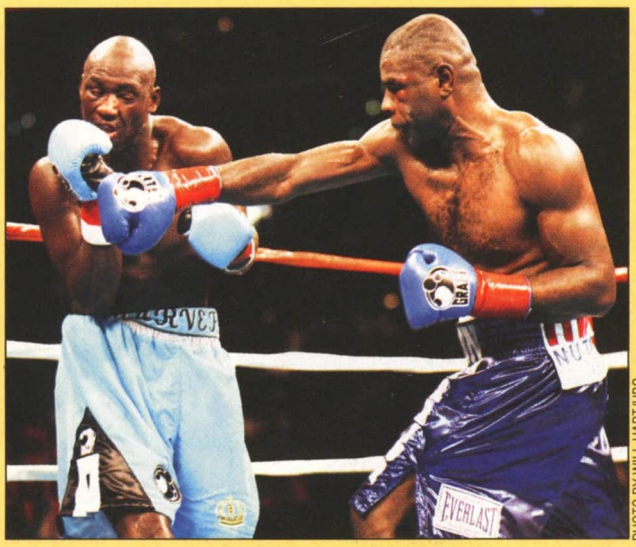


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Johnson cracks Tarver with a right

W 12 Antonio Tarver, Los Angeles, California, December 18, 2004: The tendency to underestimate Johnson continued during the lead-up to the Tarver fight, and in a way it was understandable. Tarver had been the first to prove that Jones was mortal. Moreover, he was a sparkling personality, just the sort of fighter the game needs to prosper. Sure, everybody liked and respected Johnson, but even though his kayo of Jones had been equally impressive in its own right, he was still saddled with the underdog role.

But what transpired in front of HBO's audience and the gathering of 9,126 at the Staples Center might have finally persuaded everybody that Johnson is no longer playing second banana to anybody in the light heavyweight division. Just as he did against Jones, Johnson got off to a quick start against Tarver, and although he had to walk through a lot more punches from "The Magic Man" than he did from Jones, it was the underdog's ability to keep plugging away at a brisk clip throughout the entire 12 rounds that proved his biggest advantage.

"I was never hurt in the fight," said Johnson. "A lot of the punches Tarver threw were blocked. A lot of them hit my hands. They make a big deal about his punching power, but I didn't see any evidence of it. He's the bigger and stronger man, but I had him going backward."

In the final analysis, Johnson's ability to back up Tarver on a fairly consistent basis may have been the deciding factor in the minds of the two judges that voted for him. Certainly, Tarver landed plenty of his own shots, and, according to CompuBox, he connected with 296 punches overall, compared to 217 for Johnson. But the pace took a lot out of Tarver, and he was forced to take breathers every now and then, most conspicuously in the 10th round, which he virtually gave away.

Johnson, on the other hand, never wilted despite the leather coming in his direction. Many of the rounds were exceedingly close, with first one man and then the other scoring well. Tarver did better at long range, but lacked the energy to stay there on a consistent basis, and frequently sagged in the final minute of a round after scoring effectively earlier.

It looked like Tarver might have save the day with a strong final round, but there was great anticipation and suspense as everybody awaited the verdict.

"I was definitely nervous because I've been in these situations before and it had never gone my way," admitted Johnson. "You hold your breath until you hear those words."

But when those words came, they were music to Johnson's ears … "The winner, by way of split decision, and light heavyweight champion, 'The Road Warrior,' Glen Johnson."

Judge Marty Denkin scored it for Tarver, 116-112, but he was overruled by Melvina Lathan and Chuck Giampa, who both scored it for Johnson by a 115-113 margin. While there was room for disagreement, there were no cries of robbery. It had been too good and too close of a fight for that sort of bellyaching.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR

MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA W 12
ERIK MORALES

Barrera and Morales take turns pounding each other

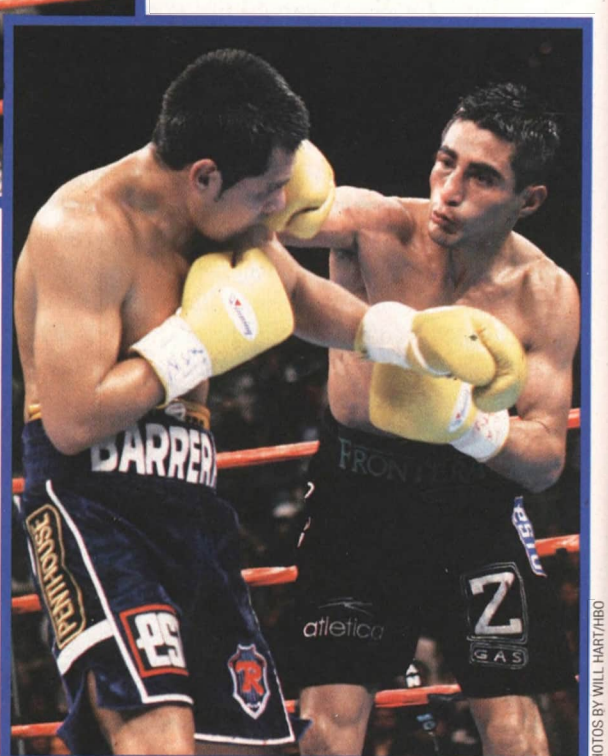
There are certain combinations that are practically guaranteed to please—peanut butter and jelly, garter belt and stockings, Donovan McNabb and Terrell Owens. It's the same way with boxing, and we can now add Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales to the list of surefire twosomes.

When they fought the first time, in 2000, this pair of Mexican dynamos created an all-time classic that won THE RING's Fight of the Year honors. Their rematch in '02 was good, but not quite in the same league. So when Barrera and Morales were pitted in a rubber match, we were confident it would be a fight worth watching, but unsure exactly how special it would be. We needn't have worried. These guys are so dedicated to their craft and so driven by their dislike for one another, there was no chance of a letdown.

Going into the third bout, November 27 on HBO Pay-Per-View, Morales was favored. Much of that had to do with Barrera's kayo loss to Manny Pacquiao in '03, but the fact that Morales had seemingly reinvigorated his career since moving up to the 130-pound division was also a factor.

It was, however, Barrera who struck first, barging into Morales at the opening bell and scoring well before the pride of Tijuana had a chance to respond. Not to be outdone, Morales punched back effectively enough to take the second.

Although each round was fiercely fought, Barrera built a considerable lead over the first half of the fight. He was quicker than Morales, who suffered a bloody nose in the early going, compli-



PHOTOS BY WILL HART/HBO

ments of his adversary's left hook and uppercut. On top of that, Barrera had a particularly good sixth round when he raked Morales with accurate volleys and appeared to have him in trouble at the bell.

Realizing that Barrera's shorter arms were better suited for inside fighting, Morales moved the action to midrange in the seventh and suddenly found a home for his thudding right hand. He continued to rally in the eighth, utilizing savvy footwork and hammering home additional rights.

Barrera responded by stepping up the pace of his own attack in the ninth and 10th, firing one blistering salvo after another. Morales tried to stay with him, and the tempo reached a frenzied peak in the 11th when they traded blows with wild abandon in a spectacular round.

Morales appeared the fresher of the pair going into the final three minutes, and although Barrera kept firing back, "El Terrible" did a bit more, particularly in the two-way punchout that had the Mandalay Bay crowd on its feet the final 30 seconds.

Morales had closed the gap enough to make the announcement of the decision a tension-filled moment, but in the minds of most, Barrera had done enough to have a clear advantage after 12 superb rounds. Two of the judges, Larry O'Connell and Jerry Roth, agreed, scoring it for Barrera, 115-114 and 115-113, respectively. Judge Paul Smith had it even at 114-114, making Barrera a majority decision winner and putting him up 2-1 in the series.

No, it wasn't quite as mind-boggling as their legendary first brawl, but it was still plenty good enough to be Fight of the Year. ■

HONORABLE MENTION

Juan Manuel Marquez' bid to take the featherweight championship away from **Manny Pacquiao** on HBO was practically over before it began when the Filipino punching machine floored him three times in the first round with sizzling lefts to the chin. Miraculously, the Mexican survived, adjusted his style to avoid Pac-Man's deadly left, and gradually fought his way back into the fight. Marquez' comeback was so effective, Pacquiao needed a late surge to salvage a draw after 12 blood-spattered rounds of riveting action.

Maybe the screaming horde of more than 17,000 celebrants at MSG made it seem a tad more exciting than it really was, but **Felix Trinidad's** first fight in more than two years (televised by HBO Pay-Per-View) was no gimme. Opponent **Ricardo Mayorga**, the former welterweight champion, now fighting at middleweight, refused to go quietly. The Nicaraguan pressed "Tito" from the start and even managed to score a flash knockdown in the third round. But once Trinidad found his punching rhythm, he punished Mayorga with both hands, flooring him three times in the eighth for a TKO victory.

Former heavyweight champion **Mike Tyson's** only ring appearance of '04 ended badly for Iron Mike when British upstart **Danny Williams** stopped him in the fourth round. But before it was over, Williams and Tyson gave Showtime's pay-per-view audience a wildly entertaining punchup. Unfortunately for Tyson, he blew out his left knee in the opening round, which helped lead to his downfall. However, it wasn't just the injury that doomed Tyson. After withstanding some hellacious shots, Williams landed hurtful blows of his own, and in the fourth he unleashed a 20-punch barrage that decked the weary Tyson, ended the fight, and earned Williams a crack at heavyweight champion Vitali Klitschko.

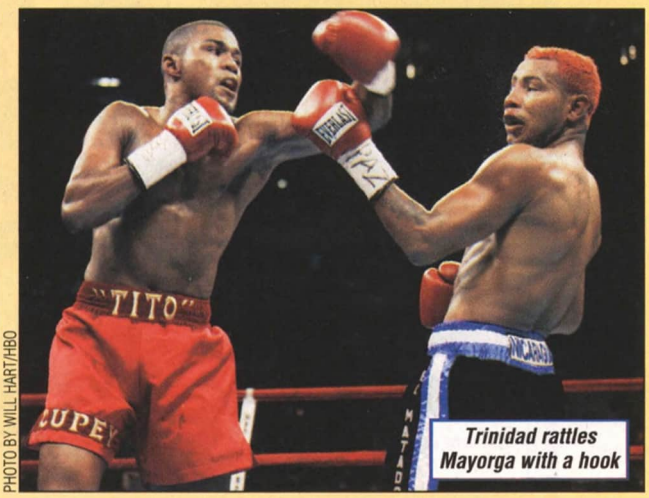


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Trinidad rattles Mayorga with a hook

In one of the best light heavyweight championship bouts seen in decades, **Glen Johnson** and **Antonio Tarver** battled back and forth for 12 rounds in December on HBO, proving beyond any doubt that it was to the fans' benefit that the fighters told the alphabet boys to shove it. Working-man's hero Johnson rallied down the stretch to pull out a nail-biter, taking the 175-pound championship by split decision.

The first brawl between super middleweights **Scott Pemberton** and **Omar Sheika** earned honorable mention in this category in '03, and as the January '04 rematch (televised by ESPN2) was equally electrifying, the pair are being honored again. The return saw Pemberton survive two knockdowns before battling back to floor Sheika in the eighth and stop him in the 10th round.

Proving yet again that you don't need a gigantic budget to put on a great fight, ESPN2 gave us a middleweight donnybrook between **Daniel Edouard** and **Willie Gibbs**. There was no feeling-out process between this pair of no-nonsense warriors. It was bombs away from the start with both connecting frequently until six consecutive right hands to the head floored Gibbs in the fourth and forced a stoppage.

In three other seesaw thrillers, aging cruiser **Carl Thompson** survived a serious beating to kayo **Sebastian Rothman** with a single punch in the ninth round, **Ebo Elder** battled through gruesome facial swellings to stop **Courtney Burton** in the 12th round of a lightweight barnburner, and unheralded **Ivan Hernandez** overcame some tough spots to ruin **Mark "Too Sharp" Johnson's** comeback with an eighth-round kayo.

ROUND OF THE YEAR

MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA-ERIK MORALES

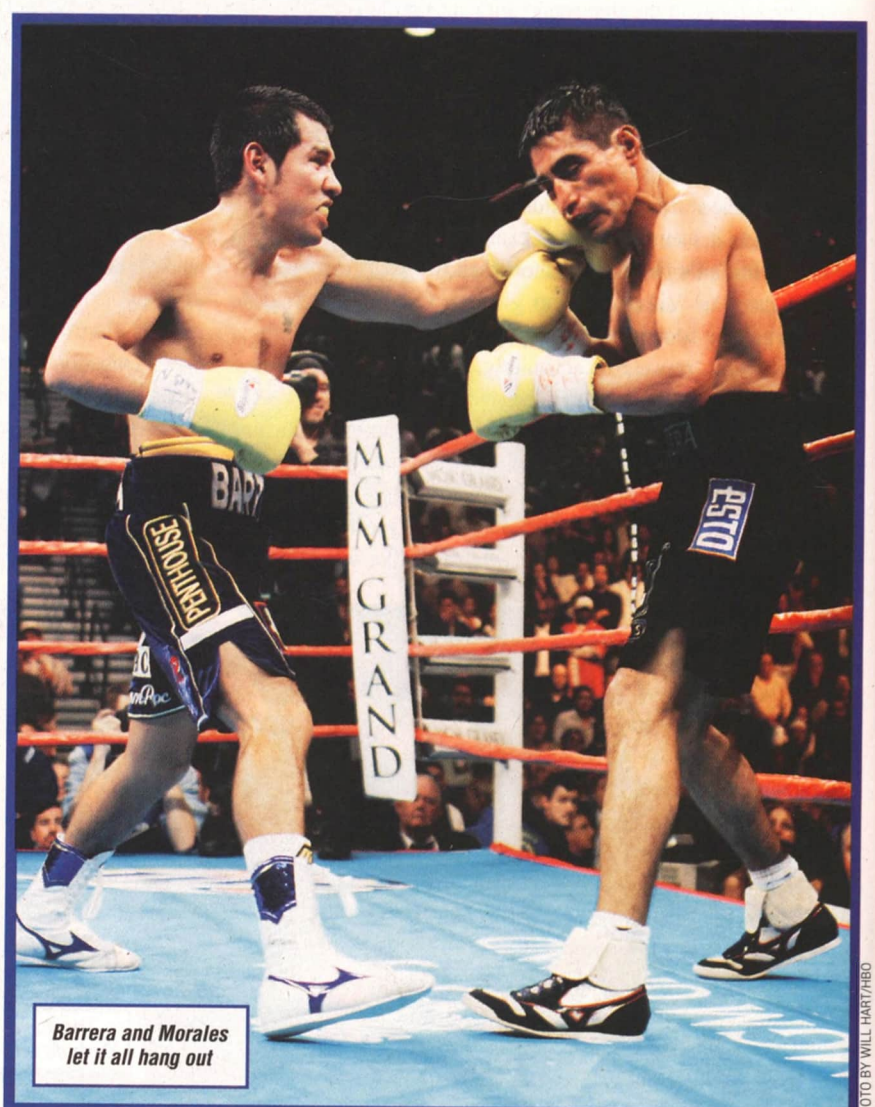
ROUND 11

With 34 rounds of their rivalry in the books, Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales knew what was hanging in the balance and where they both stood. Whether you liked the decisions or not, they were tied at one fight apiece, meaning superiority in boxing's fiercest current rivalry was at stake in their third fight, at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas in November. And with just two rounds to go, what each man needed to do was becoming clear.

On the scorecards, Morales needed to win the last two rounds to salvage a draw. He needed a knockdown along the way to pull out the victory. And though "El Terrible" didn't have the official cards handy, the innate sense acquired by a veteran of 48 fights was telling him he needed a serious rally.

Barrera's job was simple: Don't let Morales sweep the last two rounds, and above all, stay on your feet. Like his opponent, Barrera didn't know exactly what the judges were thinking, but the experience gained in 62 previous battles told him he had the lead. If he could win one more round, that lead would be secure.

When the bell clanged for round 11 of the fight and round 35 of the trilogy, Morales, who'd been unproductive in the 10th, had a determined look on his banged up face. Barrera immediately tried to change that look, however, opening with a



Barrera and Morales let it all hang out

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

double jab and scoring with a hard right and a hook. Morales jabbed back, and then the wildest exchange of the fight ensued, a 20-second tornado of punches that saw Morales take charge early with a vicious combination, only to see his hated rival rally back to win the exchange.

Morales jumped right back on the offensive and scored with a massive left hook, followed by two right hands, and Barrera, of course, answered with a quick burst that included a ripping bodyshot. Just as the crowd was about to try to catch its collective breath, Barrera unfurled a slick right-left combination on the inside that backed up the Tijuana native and ratcheted up the volume in the arena.

With about a minute to go, Barrera seemed to be edging ahead, but then Morales landed a huge uppercut and exhaustion seemed to set in for Barrera. The Mexico City fighter stumbled about and leaned on the ropes for support, but he wouldn't hold, even as Morales showered him with powershots. Just before the bell, Barrera landed a monster hook, and a final exchange ensued that capped the sizzling round perfectly.

Morales needed to win the round, and he did on the scorecards of Jerry Roth and Paul Smith. But Barrera's ability to stubbornly answer Morales at nearly every turn impressed Larry O'Connell enough to make him score the round even, which proved to be the difference in Barrera capturing a majority decision by a single point.

Both fighters gave everything they had in the 11th round. Morales got what he wanted from two judges. Barrera got what he needed from the third. And the fans got the most exceptional three minutes of gloved warfare of 2004. ■

HONORABLE MENTION

The roar from the crowd was deafening when the bell rang to commence **Felix Trinidad's** comeback fight against **Ricardo Mayorga** in October, and the volume hardly ever dipped during the fight's thrilling first three minutes. Mayorga dominated the first two-thirds of the round, nearly giving Trinidad's fans heart attacks with every wild haymaker he landed. But Mayorga's crazy bravado would soon allow the momentum to shift, as he foolishly dared one of the hardest hitters of all-time to take free shots at his chin. Trinidad obliged and drove home three flush left hooks, then proceeded to pound Mayorga for the remainder of the round, nearly blowing the roof off of a rocking Madison Square Garden.

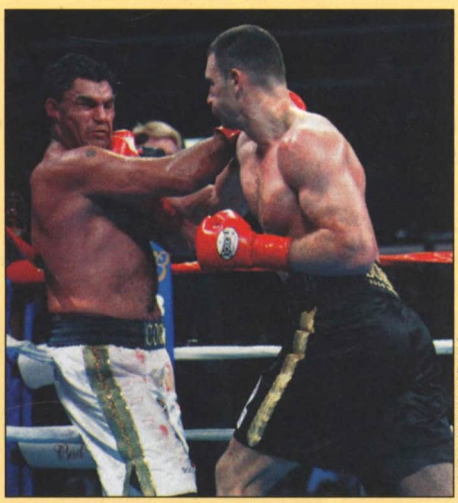


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Klitschko wallops Sanders during a sensational exchange

Apparently, inviting opponents to hit you on the chin is a formula for a great round. In the fifth round of **Nate Campbell's** March fight against **Robbie Peden**, Campbell got cocky after doubling Peden over with a bodyshot, dropping his hands to his sides and leaving his jaw exposed. Peden took advantage and leveled Campbell with a left hook, bringing a sudden and dramatic end to a memorable round.

If the entire three minutes had resembled the last 40 seconds of the third round of **Vitali Klitschko's** April fight with **Corrie Sanders**, Barrera and Morales wouldn't have claimed the Round of the Year. Unfortunately, the round took a little too long to get going before fans were treated to the sight of two heavy-handed behemoths slugging it out, almost defense-free, with the vacant heavyweight championship at stake.

The first two rounds of February's **Erik Morales-Jesus Chavez** battle both featured high drama. In the opener, a left from underdog Chavez wobbled Morales, and a scintillating series of exchanges soon followed. In round two, Morales came back to score two knockdowns, while a dazed Chavez kept firing all the way.

It was terribly one-sided, but the first round of the **Manny Pacquiao-Juan Manuel Marquez** featherweight title fight in May was nevertheless action-packed. "Pac-Man" blitzed the Mexican with his searing straight left and scored three knockdowns, but Marquez kept getting back up, setting the stage for a classic comeback.

You won't see many one-rounders more exciting than June's frenetic firefight between **Thomas Davis** and **Kendall Holt**. Undefeated prospect Holt battered Davis from one side of the ring to the other until Davis lashed out with a sudden right hand and shockingly floored Holt. With a soft chin but a big heart, Holt struggled up, only to be floored again and halted with one second remaining in the round.

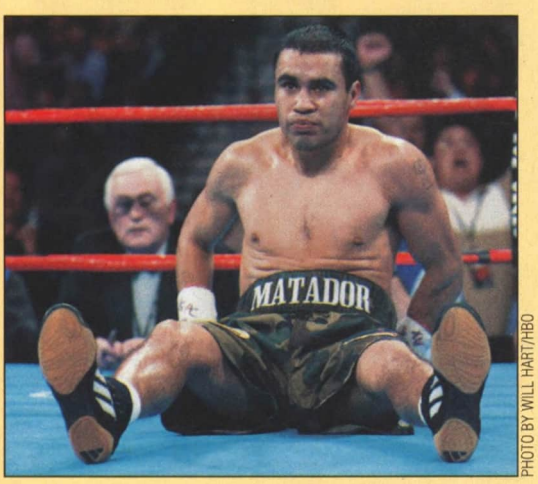


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Chavez hits the canvas in the second round

Speaking of big hearts, **Ebo Elder** showed incredible heart in the breathtaking 12th round of his December war with **Courtney Burton**. With the fight too close to call, Burton hurt Elder early in the round, but the horribly swollen Elder stormed back to knock Burton down twice and score the stoppage win.

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR

ANTONIO TARVER KO 2 ROY JONES

There are certain things you never expect to see in your lifetime—world peace, mankind walking on Mars, Roy Jones suffering a one-punch knockout.

We can forget the first two, but on May 15, 2004, fans got to witness arguably the most improbable sight in boxing: Jones getting stretched by a single punch.

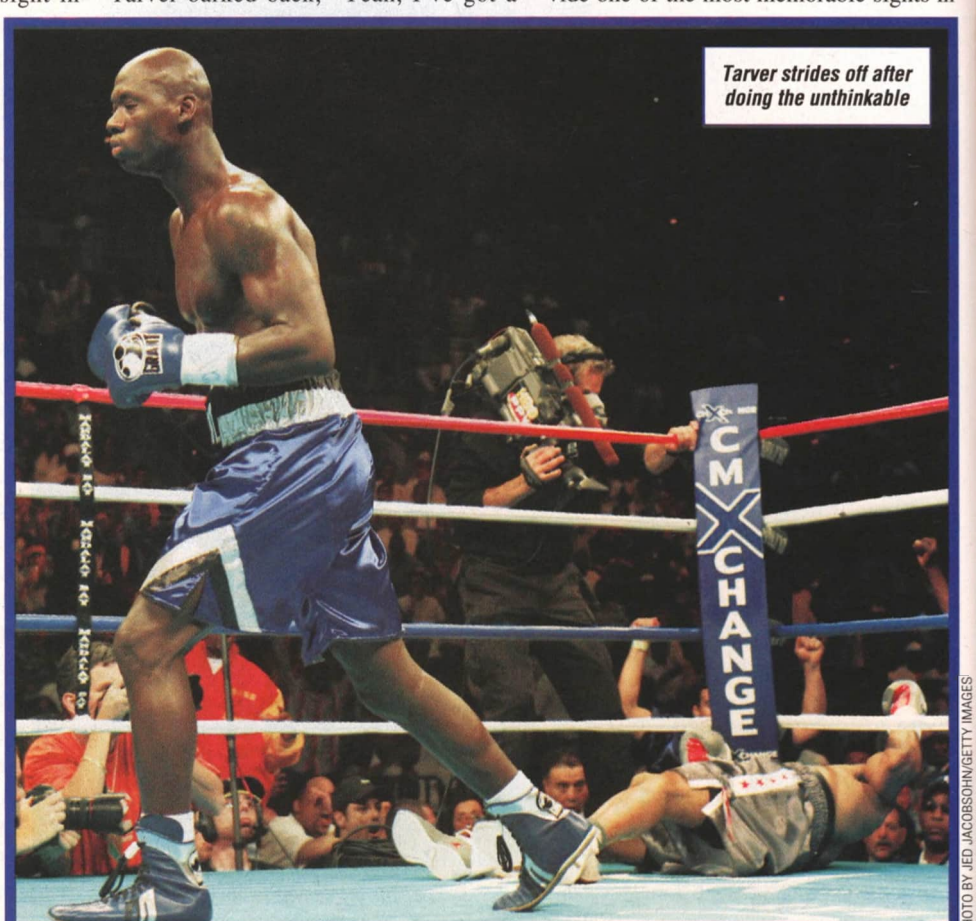
The man who delivered the knockout blow was Antonio Tarver, who had come close to upsetting Jones in their first encounter, November 8, 2003, when Jones squeaked by on an unpopular majority decision. It had been the most demanding fight of Jones' career, but there were plenty of excuses for his sub-par performance. Chief among them was the theory that the light heavyweight champion had put too great of a strain on his body by boiling back down to 175 pounds after bulking up to 193 to take the WBA heavyweight strap away from John Ruiz in his previous outing.

But the chorus of derision coming from Tarver and other anti-Jones factions (remember the pay-per-view Roycotts?), not to mention Jones' bruised ego, provoked a rematch six months after their original encounter.

HBO's viewers and those at the Mandalay Bay close enough to hear what was being said got a hint that something special was about to happen before the opening bell rang. When referee Jay Nady asked during their final instructions, "Are there any questions?" Tarver barked back, "Yeah, I've got a question: You got any excuses tonight, Roy?"

It was an audacious thing to say, but it wasn't long before Tarver backed up his mouth with his fists.

Nothing of consequence happened in the first round, but the second would provide one of the most memorable sights in



Tarver strides off after doing the unthinkable

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

boxing history. Jones missed with a right, and Tarver countered with a southpaw jab, and instantly followed with an arching left. Jones never saw the punch that destroyed his myth of invincibility coming because the lead right blinded him to the bombshell that followed.

Tarver's left plowed into Jones' head and sent him flying backward. He crashed down on his back, head and shoulders skidding under the bottom rope and partway onto the ring apron. There was an audible gasp from the crowd of 10,318 and then an eerie silence as an unthinkable tableau unfolded.

Jones rolled over, made it to his knees, and then pitched over again as Nady counted. Somehow, the stricken fighter managed to pull himself upright just before the count of 10, but the ref took one look at Jones' glazed eyes and unsteady legs, and called a halt at the 1:41 mark.

Roy Jones, the fighter many fans and media members alike considered some sort of pugilistic Superman, had been knocked out.

The aftermath of Tarver's kayo victory was considerable. It not only crowned a new 175-pound king, it made "The Magic Man" one of the most recognizable faces in the sport. Tarver's effervescent personality makes him a natural for TV guest spots, and by the time the Bernard Hopkins-Oscar De La Hoya superfight rolled around in September, Tarver was working part-time for ESPN as a roving reporter.

Jones, on the other hand, saw his legacy seriously compromised—and it would only get worse as the year progressed. ■

HONORABLE MENTION

Dorin can't beat the count following Gatti's body blow

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND

In the third round of his July bout with **Heriberto Ruiz**, bantamweight **Rafael Marquez** delivered one of those devastating shots that leaves everybody who sees it wide-eyed in amazement. It was a wicked right uppercut that smashed into Ruiz' jaw and sent him face-first to the canvas. Ruiz was out before he crash-landed, and the referee didn't even bother to count.

Junior middleweight **Kofi Jantuah** landed a similarly awe-inspiring punch in the first round of his bout with **Marco Antonio Rubio** in September, connecting with a neck-twisting left hook that put Rubio on his back for the full count.

Junior welter **Arturo Gatti** started a mini-trend with his left-hook-to-the-body kayo of **Leonard Dorin** in July. After a feel-'em-out first round, Gatti drove a near-perfect hook to Dorin's ribs and the former WBA lightweight titleholder crumpled to his hands and knees where he was counted out. In September, it was middleweight champion **Bernard Hopkins'** turn when he ended the largest grossing fight of the year in the ninth round with a left hook to **Oscar De La Hoya's** liver.

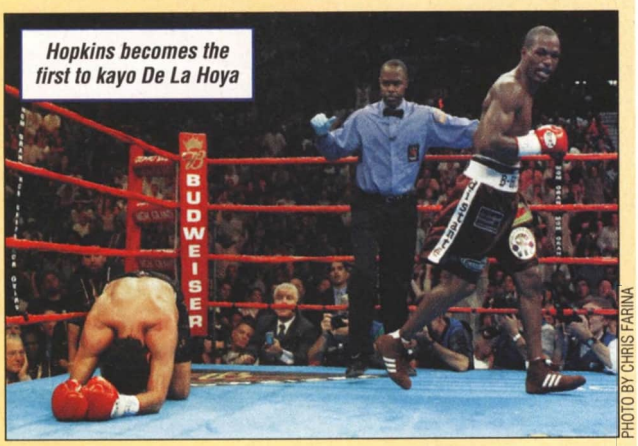
In February, British cruiserweight **Carl Thompson** tallied a classic come-from-behind kayo in the ninth round of his bout with **Sebastian Rothman**. Trailing badly and trapped on the ropes, Thompson unleashed a right hand that landed squarely on Rothman's jaw and put him on the floor. He was on his feet by the count of eight, but rescued when his legs betrayed him.

One of the weirdest knockouts of the year came in the March bout between junior lightweights **Robbie Peden** and **Nate Campbell**. In the fifth round, Campbell dropped his hands and stuck out his chin to mock his foe. Peden immediately bounced a left hook off the proffered target, and Campbell went down and out.

Although Tarver was the first, **Glen Johnson's** ninth-round knockout of **Roy Jones** in September was just as impressive in its own way. Once again it was a single punch (Johnson's right) that did the trick. And this time Jones was out cold, flat on his back, barely moving a muscle as he was counted out.

Maybe the scariest kayo of the year came in December when heavyweight **Samuel Peter** iced **Jeremy Williams** in the second round with a roundhouse left hook that ended the fight and perhaps Williams' career.

Considering the caliber of opposition, we'd be amiss not to include **Kostya Tsyzu's** third-round knockout of **Sharmba Mitchell** in November. Seldom has a number-one contender been dominated so thoroughly.



Hopkins becomes the first to kayo De La Hoya

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

UPSET
OF THE YEAR
GLEN JOHNSON KO 9 ROY JONES

Underdog Johnson jumped on Jones from the start (above) and didn't let up until he was out cold (below)

PHOTOS BY WILL HART/HBO

Losses to Joseph Kiwanuka, Merqui Sosa, Omar Sheika, Syd Vanderpool, Silvio Branco, Derrick Harmon, and Julio Gonzalez. A draw against Daniel Judah. No, the decisions weren't all fair; in fact, most of them were out-and-out ripoffs. But the fact that Glen Johnson's fights against this assortment of B-listers were even close enough to steal told us all we needed to know about him. They told us that he, too, was on the B-list.

That's why, when it was announced that Johnson would be facing Roy Jones on September 25, the Jamaican was installed as a 7-1 underdog. Even though Jones' cape was ripped off when Antonio Tarver stretched him four months earlier, there was no way the longtime pound-for-pound king, four-division titlist, and future first-ballot Hall of Famer was losing to a B-lister. Johnson was Jones' dream comeback opponent: He had an alphabet belt, he wasn't particularly fast, he rarely scored knockouts, and he was respected enough to satisfy HBO. Perfect.

As it turned out, Jones vs. Johnson was a one-sided drubbing. Just not the one we all envisioned.

We were wrong about both fighters. Johnson was better than we all thought, a legitimate championship-caliber fighter as opposed to the glorified journeyman so many labeled him as. And Jones was farther gone than anyone imagined. He wasn't just a little past his peak. He had absolutely nothing left, and to make things worse, had no grit to fall back on.

Johnson suffocated Jones in the opening round, pinning the ex-champ on the ropes

and throwing 84 punches to Jones' 31. HBO analyst Emanuel Steward thought it was a desperate and ill-advised tactic by Johnson, an invitation for exhaustion. But actually, it was the perfect tactic. Jones, never a fighter who yearned to be challenged, grew discouraged. He wanted an easy fight, and Johnson made it all too clear in the first three minutes that he wasn't getting one.

Jones did better in the second and third rounds, fighting off the ropes in spots, instead of just leaning on them and letting his opponent rip away. But by the fourth, he was growing weary and running out of ideas, and Johnson took over for good. He rocked Jones with an overhand right in the fifth, and with Jones' legs, speed, and punch resistance all waning appreciably, there was little he could muster in the way of a response. In round seven, Jones only threw 15 punches. He used to throw 15 punches in one combination.

Jones was hopelessly behind and obviously headed for defeat, but it was still almost impossible to anticipate what was to come in round nine. Less than 40 seconds in, Jones let his left hand dangle by his side, and Johnson crashed home a right hand to the side of the head. Every muscle in Jones' body turned to stone. He plummeted to the canvas, banging his head and spending the 10-count in dreamland.

Coming in, Johnson had lost to four different fighters whom Jones had beaten. But this was a different Johnson, a very different Jones, and, consequently, the biggest upset of 2004. ■

HONORABLE MENTION

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Brewster en route to an upset kayo of Wladimir

He wasn't anywhere near the supposed no-hoper Glen Johnson was, but when slight underdog **Antonio Tarver** became the first to ice **Roy Jones** in their May rematch, it was easily 2004's most jaw-dropping moment. Nobody ever imagined Tarver would knock out boxing's pound-for-pound ruler with one punch in the second round.

Nearly two decades into his pro career, **Mike Tyson** is universally regarded as a cut-rate replica of his former self, but he's still supposed to walk through anyone with losses to Julius Francis, Sinan Samil Sam, and Michael Sprott on his resume. That's why **Danny Williams'** fourth-round kayo of the former undisputed champ in July was such a stunning upset.

Whether going by the name **Yamplier Azcuy** or **Yanqui Diaz**, the opponent of undefeated heavyweight contender and former cruiserweight king **Juan Carlos Gomez** was a no-name when they stepped into the same Laredo, Texas, ring in August. But Azcuy/Diaz became a name (or two) when he stopped Gomez less than two minutes into the first round.

In what turned out to be a night of massive upsets, the chief supporting bout to Johnson-Jones saw unknown 21-year-old **Ivan Hernandez** halt **Mark Johnson's** late-career comeback with an eighth-round kayo in a back-and-forth fight. A right to the body finished off the heavily favored "Too Sharp."

Like Jones against Johnson, **Wladimir Klitschko** had been exposed before his fight with **Lamon Brewster**, but he was still expected to walk right through the underachieving Californian. And that's exactly what he did for four rounds—before suddenly hitting the wall in the fifth and collapsing for a TKO loss.

The first time **Katsushige Kawashima** took on the number one junior bantamweight in the world, **Masamori Tokuyama**, in June '03, the challenger fell short, dropping a close unanimous decision. When they fought a rematch one year and five days later, the result was drastically different: a shocking first-round knockout for underdog Kawashima.

Winky Wright wasn't a huge underdog, but it still ranked as one of the year's most significant upsets when the southpaw upended **Shane Mosley** in March. Not only did the world junior middleweight title change hands, but Wright spoiled potential superfights for Sugar Shane against Felix Trinidad and Oscar De La Hoya.

As is the case every year, highly regarded prospects lost on the way up in '04. Among the biggest shockers were **Grady Brewer**, a 15-8 (10) journeyman, starching undefeated junior middleweight hotshot **Anthony Thompson** in February, and 43-year-old **Manning Galloway** decisioning an Olympic medalist half his age, 22-year-old **Ricardo Williams**, in April. There's a reason they call Galloway "The Spoiler."

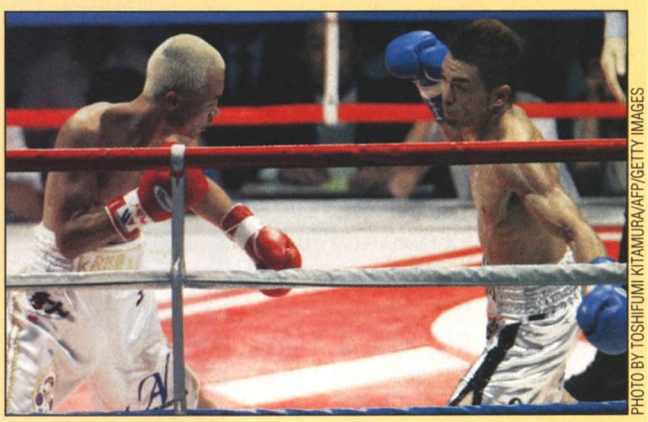


PHOTO BY TOSHIFUMI KITAMURA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Kawashima (right) rushes Tokuyama for first-round kayo

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

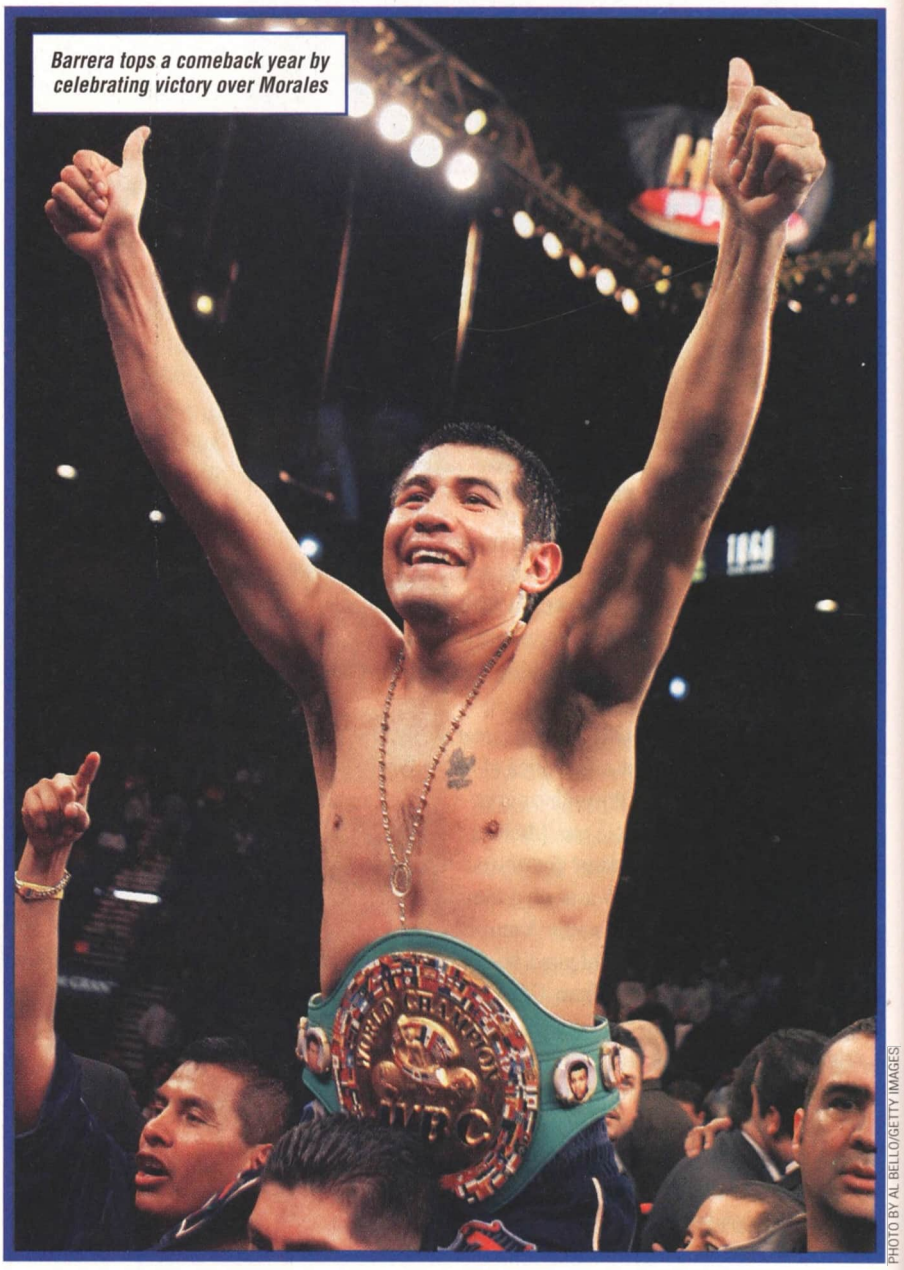
MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA

Marco Antonio Barrera had lost fights before, but never in his lengthy and accomplished career had he absorbed a beating like the one Manny Pacquiao inflicted en route to an 11th-round TKO victory on November 15, 2003. Before it was over, the Filipino whirlwind floored Barrera twice, cut him over the left eye, and lambasted him with more than 300 punches.

It was the sort of savage beating that can ruin a fighter, and most observers figured it had done just that to Barrera. After all, he was 29 years old and had already engaged in 61 pro bouts, a number of which had been punishing brawls. There was no way he could get back on top after the way Pacquiao had manhandled him.

Sure, there were some mitigating circumstances such as the discovery that Barrera has been fighting for several years with two small metal plates in his skull. Then there was the forest fire that chased him out of his training camp. But few fighters lead uncomplicated lives, and it's not uncommon for them to use these problems as excuses when things don't go well for them in the ring. There was little reason to believe Barrera was any different.

Undaunted, Barrera returned to action in June '04, stopping former junior featherweight champion Paulie Ayala in 10 rounds. But the critics weren't impressed. Ayala couldn't punch they claimed, and besides, the



Barrera tops a comeback year by celebrating victory over Morales

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Texan was on the skids and fighting over his best weight.

When it was announced that Barrera had signed for a third bout with arch-enemy Erik Morales, "El Terrible" was quickly installed as the favorite. It made sense. While Barrera seemed to be slipping, Morales had flourished since moving up to junior lightweight, taking alphabet straps away from Jesus Chavez and Carlos Hernandez. Therefore, going into their November 27 rubber match, the general feeling was that Morales would end Barrera's days as a major attraction with an authoritative victory.

This feeling was reinforced in the moments leading up to the first bell. The normally poker-faced Morales seemed unusually relaxed, and was shown on the HBO Pay-Per-View telecast laughing in his dressing room. Barrera, on the other hand, looked like a man on the way to the dentist.

Once the first bell rang, however, it was obvious that Barrera was far from washed-up. He immediately sprang to the attack before Morales had a chance to get his bearings, winning the first round on all three official scorecards. Morales got untracked in the second, and from then on they engaged in a breathtaking, seesaw struggle that rivaled their amazing first encounter.

Although every round was bitterly contested and the majority decision in Barrera's favor extremely close (115-113, 115-114, 114-114), it was the most decisive of the trilogy. It was also complete vindication for Barrera, who had clearly been bothered by assertions that he was over the hill.

"I'm not just an ordinary fighter, as people were saying," Barrera reminded everyone in the aftermath of his most significant victory since he beat Naseem Hamed in '01. Moreover, in a year that saw several well-known gladiators revive their careers, Barrera's comeback was the most noteworthy. ■

HONORABLE MENTION

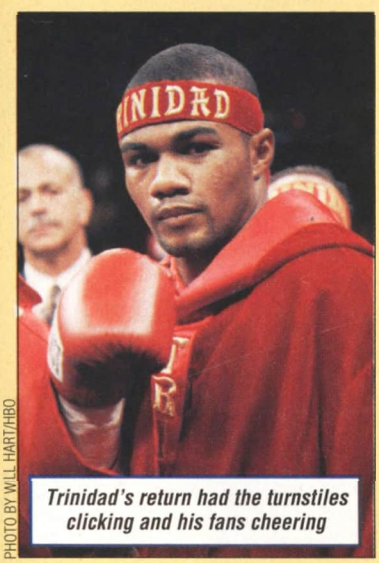


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Trinidad's return had the turnstiles clicking and his fans cheering

No comeback in 2004 generated more excitement and mainstream interest than that of living legend **Felix Trinidad**, who thrilled his fans by going back on his July '02 retirement announcement to face Ricardo Mayorga in October. "Tito" won via eighth-round kayo in front of an absolutely electric crowd at Madison Square Garden, leaving some experts suggesting the Puerto Rican was even better than when he left the game. Were it not for the fact that Mayorga was a made-to-order opponent, this boxing-boosting return might have been the Comeback of the Year.

For an entirely different set of reasons, **Kostya Tszyu** also came back in '04 from the longest layoff of his career. The junior welterweight champion had to postpone his rematch with Sharmba Mitchell twice—first because of an Achilles tendon injury, then because of a torn rotator cuff. When the fight finally came together in November, there was reason to suspect that Tszyu's inactivity and injuries would prove too much to overcome against his true number-one contender. Instead, he delivered his most perfect performance yet, brutalizing Mitchell in three rounds.

Diego Corrales has known plenty of highs and lows, and he came into '04 on a low note, having been stopped on cuts by Joel Casamayor in his last fight. But the hard-punching Corrales evened the score by decisioning the Cuban in their March rematch, then tallied a dramatic come-from-behind knockout over previously undefeated Acelino Freitas to complete his return to boxing's elite.

If you gave up on lightweight **Julio Diaz** after his first-round blastout at the hands of Juan Valenzuela back in 2002, you weren't alone. But "The Kidd" became "The Comeback Kidd" in '04, first upsetting Courtney Burton via stirring 11th-round knockout, then boxing circles around Javier Jauregui for his first alphabet title.

With his 40th birthday just months away at the start of the year, **Carl Thompson** was an afterthought, a former contender who'd been on the slide for a good five years. So it must have surprised Sebastian Rothman and David Haye as much as it surprised us when Thompson kayoed both young prospects and vaulted back into the cruiserweight title picture.

Was there a more unlikely success story this year than **Andrew Golota**, the disgraced (many times over), semi-retired choke artist? He battled to a hard-earned draw with Chris Byrd in April, then followed that up with a narrow loss to John Ruiz in November that could've easily gone the other way. No, the heavyweight division isn't what it used to be, but for Golota to go essentially even-up with THE RING's top two contenders is a heck of an accomplishment.

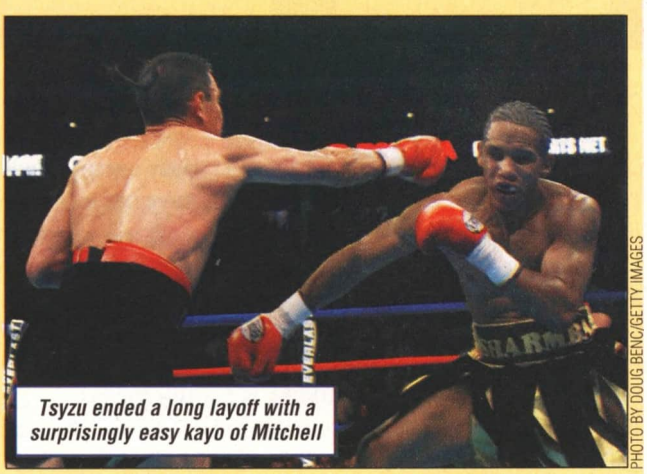


PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

Tsyzu ended a long layoff with a surprisingly easy kayo of Mitchell

EVENT
OF THE YEAR
LENNOX LEWIS' RETIREMENT

Lewis' abdication shook the heavyweight landscape

PHOTO BY IAN WALDIE/GETTY IMAGES

If the significance of an event can be judged by its consequences, then the retirement of heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis on February 6, 2004, was indeed a momentous happening.

Although the alphabet groups had already started to splinter the title that Lewis had unified, even the fighters who held the other belts knew that Lewis was the genuine champion. But with the big Brit out of the picture, a mad scramble to fill the void began the moment Lewis made his announcement. Suddenly, without a dominant figure sitting on top of the sport's glamour division, the field was wide open. Sadly, the contestants were far more numerous than talented.

It was easy to brush aside the claims of various beltholders when Lewis was on the throne. But in a left-handed way, his abdication gave the pretenders a sort of shabby authenticity that was impossible while he still reigned.

Lewis' absence also forced us to focus on how threadbare the ranks of boxing's largest practitioners had become. A lot of that had to do with the retired champ, who had beaten the likes of Evander Holyfield, Mike Tyson, Hasim Rahman, David Tua, Andrew Golota, and Vitali Klitschko before stepping aside. Moreover, those who hadn't shared a ring with Lewis were hardly material for a golden heavyweight era.

In many ways, Lewis' exit was a typical case of not fully appreciating what you had until it's gone. Although widely respected, Lewis never basked in the sort of mass adulation many heavyweight champions enjoy. Part of that had to do

with his laidback personality and penchant for privacy, but it must also be admitted that his ring performances were not always the stuff of legend.

Against some opponents—Ray Mercer, Shannon Briggs, Michael Grant, Golota, Tyson, Klitschko—Lewis turned in entertaining, hard-hitting performances. But against others—Zeljko Mavrovic, Tua, Holyfield—he was far from scintillating.

On the whole, Lewis was a good champion. He ducked nobody, carried himself with pride and dignity, and never did anything to bring dishonor to the game.

Lewis should also be commended for getting out before age reduced him to a shell of what he was in his prime. Some overstay their welcome for financial reasons, others because they hate to step out of the spotlight. Lewis, having taken care of both his body and his money, was able to set an example for others and become the first heavyweight since Rocky Marciano to retire on top. In the long run, that might be his most enduring legacy.

"There's always somebody to fight," said the 38-year-old Lewis at the London press conference he called to announce his retirement. "I realize I don't want to get caught up in it. There has to be a time to gracefully bow out."

The perfect time would have been after he thrashed Tyson in '02, but Lewis went to the well one more time, against Klitschko in June '03, and almost fell in and drowned. But Lewis apparently learned from that close call, and did the right thing despite promoters dangling tens of millions of dollars in his face for a rematch with Klitschko.

Meanwhile, boxing is still struggling to deal with the aftermath of Lewis' exit. ■

HONORABLE MENTION

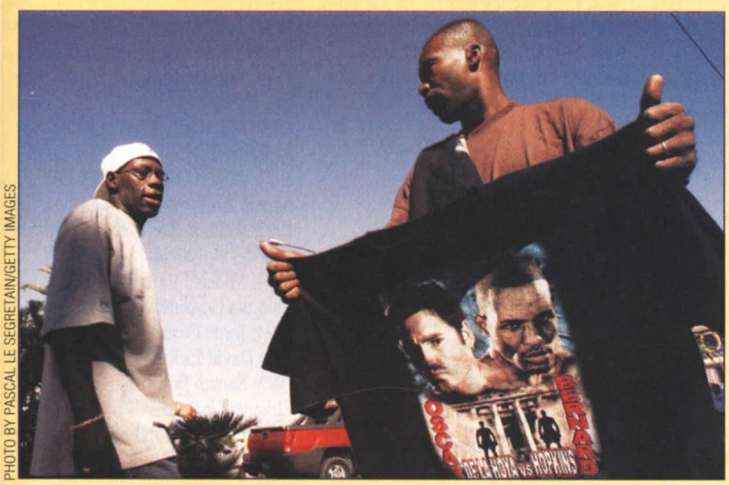


PHOTO BY PASCAL LE SEGRETAIN/GETTY IMAGES

Merchandise from the Hopkins-De La Hoya superfight went fast

When it came to making money and attracting fans, no fight in '04 came close to **Oscar De La Hoya's** attempt to take the middleweight title away from **Bernard Hopkins**. When they fought on September 18 in Las Vegas, a crowd of more than 16,000 filled the MGM Grand Garden Arena to create a live gate of almost $13-million, while approximately one million homes purchased the HBO pay-per-view. It was like old times in Vegas on fight weekend, with the city brimming with fight fans, many of whom gobbled up the more than 20,000 closed-circuit tickets available at other casinos. All told, it was the second-largest-grossing non-heavyweight fight of all-time.

For sheer fan enthusiasm, it would be tough to top the return of **Felix Trinidad** on October 2. There were more than 17,000 hero-worshipping fans at Madison Square Garden creating a fantastic atmosphere with former welterweight champion **Ricardo Mayorga** in the other corner. "Tito" did not disappoint, coming off the floor to hand Mayorga a savage beating en route to an eighth-round TKO victory. Trinidad's comeback gave the industry a big boost.

The year got off to an ominous start for **Bob Arum** when the **FBI** raided the offices of his promotional company, **Top Rank**, on January 6. Federal agents seized computers, contracts, medical records, fight tapes, and other financial documents as part of a probe into fight fixing, forged medical documents, tampering with weigh-in scales, and illegal transportation of Mexican fighters to the U.S.

On November 8, a federal jury in Las Vegas convicted manager **Robert Mitchell**, 42, and boxer **Thomas Williams**, 35, on one count of conspiracy to commit sports bribery and one count of sports bribery. Mitchell and Thomas fixed fights from March 1995 to August 2000. Manager **Robert Mittleman**, who had pleaded guilty in May to fixing fights and trying to bribe a federal prosecutor, provided much of the testimony that helped convict Mitchell and Williams.

Although the twin announcements didn't have as huge an impact on the sport as Lewis' decision to hang up his gloves, **Vinny Paz** and **Sven Ottke** both retired on the same day, March 27. The popular Paz, who won alphabet belts at lightweight and junior middleweight, ended his career with a decision over Tocker Pudwill in Connecticut. Meanwhile, approximately 3,000 miles away in Magdeburg, Germany, Ottke, who held the IBF and WBA super middleweight belts at the time, ended his unbeaten pro career with a 34-0 (6) record by winning a 12-round decision over Armand Krajnc.

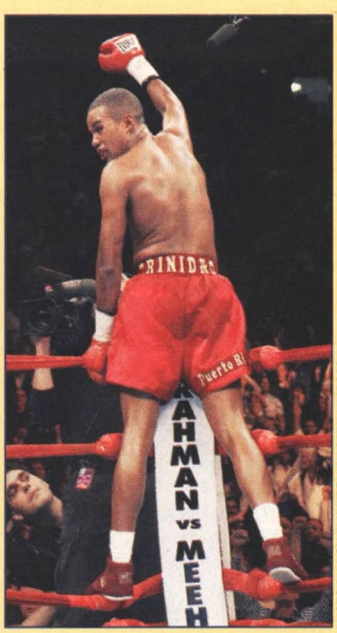


PHOTO BY DON EMMERT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The return of Tito was a stirring event

PAST WINNERS

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

1928: Gene Tunney
1929: Tommy Loughran
1930: Max Schmeling
1931: Tommy Loughran
1932: Jack Sharkey
1933: No Award
1934: Tony Canzoneri/Barney Ross
1935: Barney Ross
1936: Joe Louis
1937: Henry Armstrong
1938: Joe Louis
1939: Joe Louis
1940: Billy Conn
1941: Joe Louis
1942: Ray Robinson
1943: Fred Apostoli
1944: Beau Jack
1945: Willie Pep
1946: Tony Zale
1947: Gus Lesnevich
1948: Ike Williams
1949: Ezzard Charles
1950: Ezzard Charles
1951: Ray Robinson
1952: Rocky Marciano
1953: Bobo Olson
1954: Rocky Marciano
1955: Rocky Marciano
1956: Floyd Patterson
1957: Carmen Basilio
1958: Ingemar Johansson
1959: Ingemar Johansson
1960: Floyd Patterson
1961: Joe Brown
1962: Dick Tiger
1963: Cassius Clay
1964: Emile Griffith
1965: Dick Tiger
1966: No Award
1967: Joe Frazier
1968: Nino Benvenuti
1969: Jose Napoles
1970: Joe Frazier
1971: Joe Frazier
1972: Muhammad Ali/Carlos Monzon
1973: George Foreman
1974: Muhammad Ali
1975: Muhammad Ali
1976: George Foreman
1977: Carlos Zarate
1978: Muhammad Ali
1979: Ray Leonard
1980: Thomas Hearns
1981: Ray Leonard/Salvador Sanchez
1982: Larry Holmes
1983: Marvin Hagler
1984: Thomas Hearns
1985: Marvin Hagler/Donald Curry
1986: Mike Tyson
1987: Evander Holyfield
1988: Mike Tyson
1989: Pernell Whitaker
1990: Julio Cesar Chavez
1991: James Toney
1992: Riddick Bowe
1993: Michael Carbajal

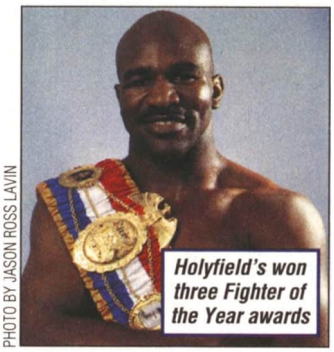


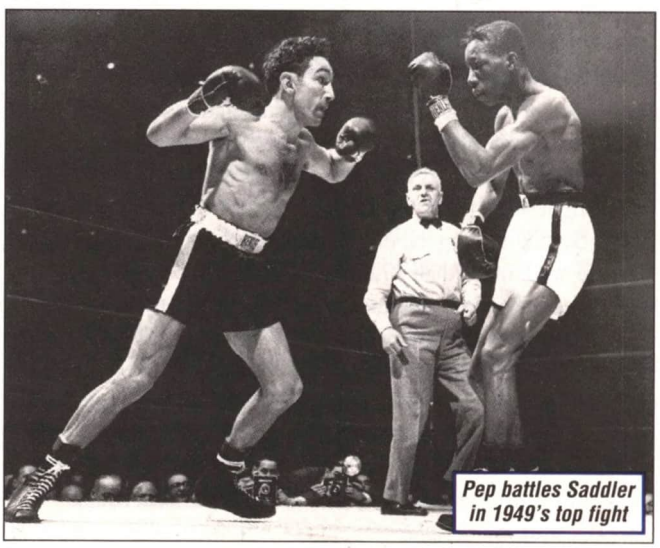
PHOTO BY JASON ROSS LAVIN

Holyfield's won three Fighter of the Year awards

1994: Roy Jones
1995: Oscar De La Hoya
1996: Evander Holyfield
1997: Evander Holyfield
1998: Floyd Mayweather
1999: Paulie Ayala
2000: Felix Trinidad
2001: Bernard Hopkins
2002: Vernon Forrest
2003: James Toney

FIGHT OF THE YEAR

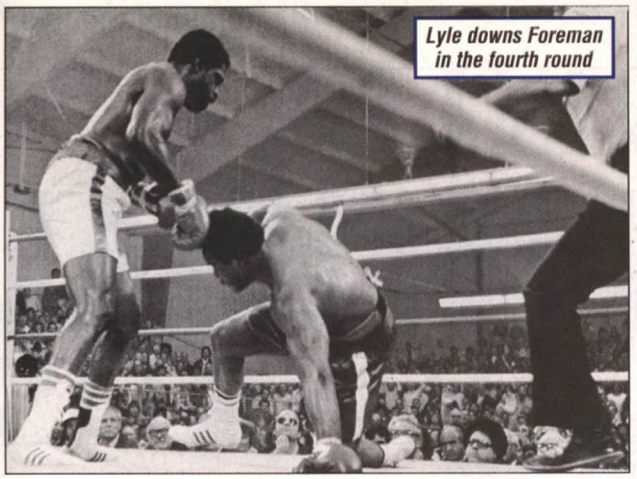
1945: Rocky Graziano KO 10
Freddie Cochrane
1946: Tony Zale KO 6
Rocky Graziano
1947: Rocky Graziano KO 6
Tony Zale
1948: Marcel Cerdan KO 12
Tony Zale
1949: Willie Pep W 15
Sandy Saddler
1950: Jake LaMotta KO 15
Laurent Dauthuille
1951: Jersey Joe Walcott KO 7
Ezzard Charles
1952: Rocky Marciano KO 13
Jersey Joe Walcott
1953: Rocky Marciano KO 11
Roland LaStarza
1954: Rocky Marciano KO 8
Ezzard Charles
1955: Carmen Basilio KO 12
Tony DeMarco
1956: Carmen Basilio KO 9
Johnny Saxton
1957: Carmen Basilio W 15
Ray Robinson
1958: Ray Robinson W 15
Carmen Basilio
1959: Gene Fullmer KO 14
Carmen Basilio
1960: Floyd Patterson KO 5
Ingemar Johansson
1961: Joe Brown W 15
Dave Charnley
1962: Joey Giardello W 10
Henry Hank
1963: Cassius Clay W 10
Doug Jones
1964: Cassius Clay KO 7
Sonny Liston
1965: Floyd Patterson W 12
George Chuvalo
1966: Jose Torres W 15
Eddie Cotton
1967: Nino Benvenuti W 15
Emile Griffith
1968: Dick Tiger W 10
Frank DePaula
1969: Joe Frazier KO 7
Jerry Quarry
1970: Carlos Monzon KO 12
Nino Benvenuti
1971: Joe Frazier W 15
Muhammad Ali
1972: Bob Foster KO 14
Chris Finnegan
1973: George Foreman KO 2
Joe Frazier
1974: Muhammad Ali KO 8
George Foreman
1975: Muhammad Ali KO 14
Joe Frazier
1976: George Foreman KO 5
Ron Lyle
1977: Jimmy Young W 12
George Foreman
1978: Leon Spinks W 15
Muhammad Ali
1979: Danny Lopez KO 15
Mike Ayala
1980: Matthew Saad Muhammad
KO 14 Yaqui Lopez
1981: Sugar Ray Leonard KO 14
Thomas Hearns
1982: Bobby Chacon W 15
Bazooka Limon
1983: Bobby Chacon W 12
Cornelius Boza-Edwards
1984: Jose Luis Ramirez KO 4
Edwin Rosario
1985: Marvin Hagler KO 3
Thomas Hearns
1986: Steve Cruz W 15
Barry McGuigan
1987: Sugar Ray Leonard W 12
Marvin Hagler
1988: Tony Lopez W 12
Rocky Lockridge
1989: Roberto Duran W 12
Iran Barkley
1990: Julio Cesar Chavez KO 12
Meldrick Taylor
1991: Robert Quiroga W 12
Akeem Anifowoshe
1992: Riddick Bowe W 12
Evander Holyfield
1993: Michael Carbajal KO 7
Chiquita Gonzalez
1994: Jorge Castro KO 9
John David Jackson
1995: Saman Sorjaturong KO 7
Chiquita Gonzalez
1996: Evander Holyfield KO 11
Mike Tyson
1997: Arturo Gatti KO 5
Gabriel Ruelas
1998: Ivan Robinson W 10
Arturo Gatti
1999: Paulie Ayala W 12
Johnny Tapia
2000: Erik Morales W 12
Marco Antonio Barrera
2001: Micky Ward W 10
Emanuel Burton
2002: Micky Ward W 10
Arturo Gatti
2003: Arturo Gatti W 10
Micky Ward



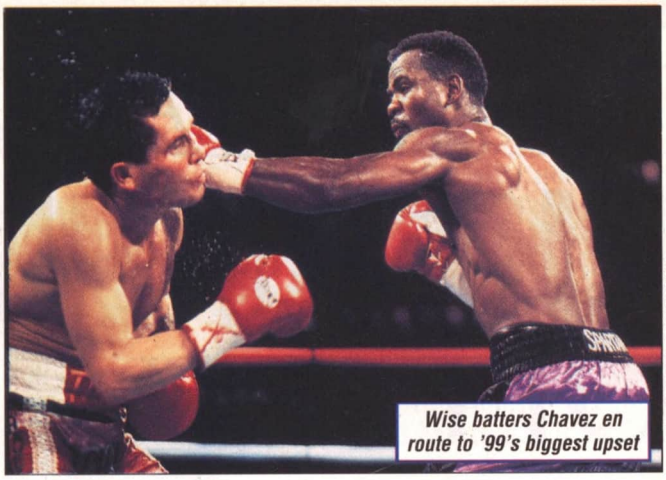
Pep battles Saddler in 1949's top fight

ROUND OF THE YEAR

1945: Joyce-Williams, 12
1946: Zale-Graziano, 6
1947: Louis-Walcott, 4
1948: Louis-Walcott, 11
1949: Graziano-Fusari, 10
1950: LaMotta-Dauthuille, 15
1951: Marciano-Louis, 8
1952: Marciano-Walcott, 13
1953: Gavilan-Basilio, 2
1954: Moore-Johnson, 14
1955: Moore-Olson, 3



Lyle downs Foreman in the fourth round



Wise batters Chavez en route to '99's biggest upset

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/SHOWTIME

1956: Robinson-Olson, 4
1957: Robinson-Fullmer, 5
1958: Johansson-Machen, 1
1959: Johansson-Patterson, 3
1960: Patterson-Johansson, 5
1961: Patterson-Johansson, 1
1962: Liston-Patterson, 1
1963: Liston-Patterson, 1
1964: Torres-Olson, 1
1965: Torres-Pastrano, 6
1966: Ortiz-Ramos, 5
1967: Tiger-Rouse, 12
1968: Foster-Tiger, 4
1969: Benvenuti-Rodriguez, 11
1970: Ali-Bonavena, 15
1971: Frazier-Ali, 15
1972: Ali-Foster, 5
1973: Foreman-Frazier, 2
1974: Ali-Foreman, 8
1975: Ali-Frazier, 12
1976: Foreman-Lyle, 4 & 5
1977: Young-Foreman, 12
1978: Spinks-Ali, 15
1979: Franklin-Johnson, 8
1980: Saad Muhammad-Lopez, 8
1981: Lee-LoCicero, 5
1982: Gomez-Pintor, 3
1983: Holmes-Witherspoon, 9
1984: Meza-Garza, 1
1985: Hagler-Hearns, 1
1986: Cruz-McGuigan, 15
1987: Seabrooks-Jacob, 1
1988: Tyson-Spinks, 1
1989: Gutierrez-Franklin, 12
1990: Davis-Breland, 9
1991: No Award
1992: Bowe-Holyfield, 10
1993: Norris-Waters, 2
1994: Castro-Jackson, 9
1995: Sorjaturong-Gonzalez, 7
1996: Liles-Littles, 3
1997: Gatti-Ruelas, 5
1998: Robinson-Gatti II, 3
1999: De La Hoya-Quartey, 6
2000: Morales-Barrera, 5
2001: Hopkins-Trinidad, 10
2002: Ward-Gatti I, 9
2003: Freitas-Barrios, 11

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR

1989: Michael Nunn KO 1
Sumbu Kalambay
1990: Terry Norris KO 1
John Mugabi
1991: No Award
1992: Kennedy McKinney KO 11
Welcome Ncita
Morris East KO 11
Akinobu Hiranaka
1993: Gerald McClellan KO 5
Julian Jackson
1994: George Foreman KO 10
Michael Moorer
1995: Julio Cesar Vasquez KO 11
Carl Daniels
1996: Wilfredo Vasquez KO 11
Eloy Rojas
1997: Arturo Gatti KO 5
Gabriel Ruelas
1998: Roy Jones KO 4
Virgil Hill
1999: Derrick Jefferson KO 6
Maurice Harris
2000: Ben Tackie KO 10
Roberto Garcia
2001: Lennox Lewis KO 4
Hasim Rahman
2002: Lennox Lewis KO 8
Mike Tyson
2003: Rocky Juarez KO 10
Antonio Diaz

UPSET OF THE YEAR

1980: Yasutsune Uehara KO 6
Sammy Serrano
1981: Roger Stafford W 10
Pipino Cuevas
1982: Kirkland Laing W 10
Roberto Duran
1983: Gerrie Coetzee KO 10
Michael Dokes
1984: Gene Hatcher KO 11
Johnny Bumphus
1985: Michael Spinks W 15
Larry Holmes
1986: Lloyd Honeyghan KO 6
Donald Curry
1987: Sugar Ray Leonard W 12
Marvin Hagler
1988: Iran Barkley KO 3
Thomas Hearns
1989: Rene Jacquot W 12
Donald Curry
1990: Buster Douglas KO 10
Mike Tyson
1991: No Award
1992: Azumah Nelson KO 8
Jeff Fenech
1993: Simon Brown KO 4
Terry Norris
1994: Vuyani Bungu W 12
Kennedy McKinney
1995: Willy Salazar KO 7
Danny Romero
1996: Evander Holyfield KO 11
Mike Tyson
1997: Vince Phillips KO 10
Kostya Tszyu
1998: Ivan Robinson W 10
Arturo Gatti
1999: Willy Wise W 10
Julio Cesar Chavez
2000: Jose Luis Castillo W 12
Steve Johnston
2001: Hasim Rahman KO 5
Lennox Lewis
2002: Juan Carlos Rubio W 10
Francisco Bojado
2003: Corrie Sanders KO 2
Wladimir Klitschko

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

1980: Shoji Oguma
1981: Jimmy Young
1982: Bobby Chacon
1983: Roberto Duran
1984: Marvin Johnson
1985: Lupe Pintor
1986: Edwin Rosario
1987: Frankie Duarte
1988: Michael Dokes
1989: Roberto Duran
1990: Tony Lopez
1991: Vinny Pazienza
1992: Iran Barkley
1993: Zack Padilla
1994: George Foreman
1995: Azumah Nelson
1996: Danny Romero
1997: Vince Phillips
1998: Kostya Tszyu
1999: Michael Carbajal
2000: Virgil Hill
2001: John Michael Johnson
2002: Arturo Gatti
2003: James Toney

EVENT OF THE YEAR

1993: Fan Man at Holyfield-Bowe
1994: Revenge: The Rematches
1995: Tyson returns
1996: Riot at The Garden
1997: The bite
1998: Tyson's reinstatement
1999: The IBF indictments
2000: Mosley vs. De La Hoya
2001: Middleweight World Championship Series
2002: The Lewis-Tyson press conference brawl
2003: Roy Jones fights at heavyweight

Jones' heavyweight debut was the event of 2003

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

THE 26th ANNUAL HIGHLY UNOFFICIAL OFFICIAL AWARDS

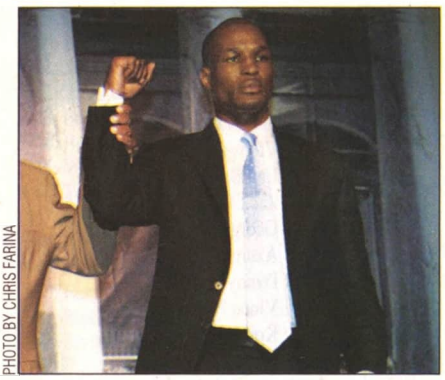


PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Hopkins managed his own career brilliantly

Manager Of The Year
Bernard Hopkins

Trainer Of The Year
Nacho Beristain

Female Fighter Of The Year
Mary Jo Sanders

Female Fight Of The Year
Jane Couch W 10 Jaime Clampitt

Most Exciting Division
Junior Lightweight

Most Boring Division
Flyweight

Division With Most Potential
Junior Welterweight (for the third year in a row)

Division With Least Potential
Strawweight

Count Dracula Bloodbath Crimson Band-Aid
Daniel Santos Tech. Win 9 Antonio Margarito
Carlos Hernandez W 10 Juan Carlos Ramirez
Mike Anchondo Tech. Win 5 Jose Luis Soto
Yutaka Niida W 12 Juan Landaeta

Future Champion Trophy
Kermit Cintron

Billy Graham-Joey Giardello Highway Robbery Award
Courtney Burton W 10 Emanuel Augustus
Matt Vanda W 10 Sam Garr
Cassius Baloyi W 12 Lehlo Ledwaba
Lamon Brewster W 12 Kali Meehan

Tony Zale Bodypuncher Memorial
Ricky Hatton

Eder Jofre Best-Fighter-You-Never-Saw Award
Yodsanan Nanthachai

Duane Bobick Disappointment Award
Juan Carlos Gomez, Dominick Guinn, Ricardo Williams, Tokunbo Olajide, Anthony Thompson

Rocky Balboa Gutsiest Effort Award
Juan Manuel Marquez (vs. Manny Pacquiao)
Jesus Chavez (vs. Erik Morales)
Marco Antonio Barrera (vs. Erik Morales)
Erik Morales (vs. Marco Antonio Barrera)
Juan Lazcano (vs. Jose Luis Castillo)
Chris Byrd (vs. Jameel McCline)
Scott Pemberton (vs. Omar Sheika)
Omar Sheika (vs. Scott Pemberton & Jeff Lacy)
Daniel Edouard (vs. Willie Gibbs)
Troy Rowland (vs. Epifanio Mendoza)
Ebo Elder (vs. Courtney Burton)

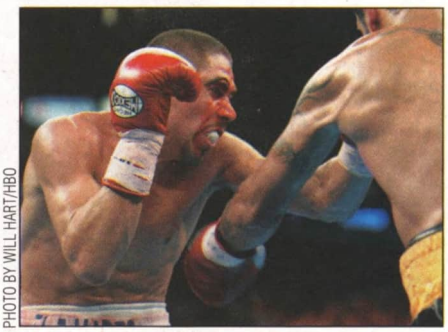


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Margarito lost some plasma against Santos

Henry Armstrong Windmill Imitation
Oscar Larios

Red Light-Green Light Crossroads Fight Of The Year
Jesse James Leija W 10 Francisco Bojado

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/HBO

It was red light for Bojado, green light for Leija

The Comedy-On-TV Golden Giggles Award
The thespianically challenged Oscar De La Hoya's motivational speeches on *The Next Great Champ*

Slapsie Maxie Rosenbloom Featherfists Award
Eagle Kyowa

Should've-Stayed-In-The-Pasture Wall Calendar
Riddick Bowe, Bruce Seldon, Lou Savarese, Joseph Kiwanuka, Harold Brazier, Raul Marquez

Muhammad Ali Time-To-Retire Pension Check
Roy Jones, Angel Manfredy, Joe Mesi, Lamar Murphy, Ezra Sellers, Johnny Tapia, Imamu Mayfield, William Joppy

Tony Ayala Jr. Wasted Talent Trophy
Eric Morel

Thomas Dewey "Fading Down The Stretch" Award
Acelino Freitas (vs. Diego Corrales)

Buster Mathis Miniature Empty Refrigerator
Michael Moorer

Don't-Get-Up-To-Get-A-Beer Silver Mug
Antonio Tarver KO 2 Roy Jones
Kofi Jantuah KO 1 Marco Antonio Rubio
Arturo Gatti KO 2 Leonard Dorin
Katsushige Kawashima KO 1 Masamori Tokuyama
Verno Phillips KO 1 Julio Garcia
Daniel Ponce DeLeon KO 1 Jesus Perez
Tom Davis KO 1 Kendall Holt
Rico Hoye KO 1 Donnell Wiggins
Mike Arnaoutis KO 1 Jesse Feliciano
Samuel Peter KO 2 Jeremy Williams

Howard Cosell "We Love Boxing" Trophy
Graciano Rocchigiani, for cutting a deal with the WBC and allowing the alphabet group to escape bankruptcy

Ken Norton Media Good Guy Award
Chris Byrd

Muhammad Ali "How To Lose With Class" Trophy
Oscar De La Hoya (for a change)

Spit-Or-Get-Off-The-Pot Award
Audley Harrison, Joe Calzaghe, Veerapol Sahaprom

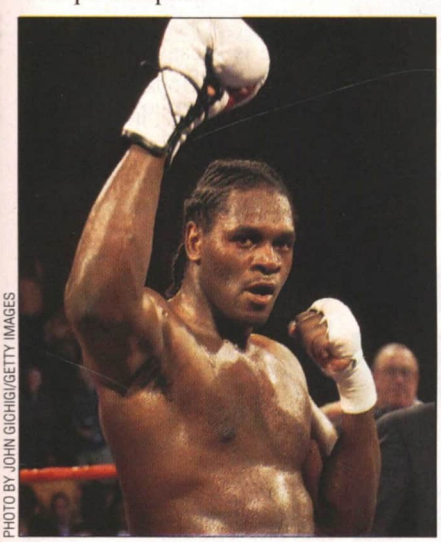


PHOTO BY JOHN GIOHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Whatcha waiting for, Audley?

Joe Bugner Just-Glad-To-Be-Here Trophy
Orlando Salido (vs. Juan Manuel Marquez)
Nedal Hussein (vs. Oscar Larios)
Robert Allen (vs. Bernard Hopkins)
Calvin Brock (vs. Terry Smith)
Hercules Kyvelos (vs. Antonio Margarito)

Frightening-Amounts-Of-Blubber Whaling Harpoon
Gerald Nobles vs. Bruce Seldon

Archie Moore Ol'-Man-River Rocking Chair
Carl Thompson

Jake LaMotta Cast-Iron Chin Anvil
Ricardo Mayorga (vs. Felix Trinidad)
Juan Lazcano (vs. Jose Luis Castillo)
Omar Sheika (vs. Jeff Lacy)
Corrie Sanders (vs. Vitali Klitschko)
Carlos Contreras (vs. Daniel Ponce DeLeon)

Most Improved Fighter Award
Juan Diaz

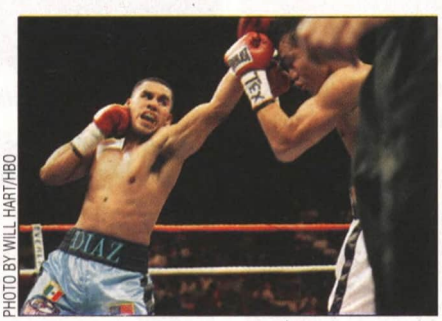


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Diaz took it to the next level in '04

Gene Tunney Distinguished Champion Award
Winky Wright

Tap Tap Makathini Name Of The Year
Terdsak Jandaeng

Azumah Nelson "Where'd He Come From?" Trophy
Felix Sturm (L 12 Oscar De La Hoya)
Ivan Hernandez (KO 8 Mark Johnson)
Yanqui Diaz (KO 1 Juan Carlos Gomez)
Eagle Kyowa (W 12 Jose Aguirre)
Eddie Sanchez (W 12 J.C. Candelo)
Mikkel Kessler (KO 8 Manny Siaca)

TV Mismatches Of The Year
Jermain Taylor KO 1 Alex Rios (ESPN2)
Jermain Taylor KO 9 Raul Marquez (HBO)
Zab Judah KO 1 Wayne Martell (HBO PPV)
Cory Spinks W 12 Miguel Angel Gonzalez (Showtime)
Jose Luis Castillo KO 2 Derrick Parks (Telefutura)
Rafael Marquez KO 2 Pete Frissina (HBO)
Jameel McCline KO 1 Wayne Llewelyn (Showtime)
Fernando Montiel KO 3 Samuel Lopez (HBO Latino)
Laila Ali KO 4 Nikki Eplion (PPV)

Never-In-A-Bad-Fight Purple Heart
Erik Morales, Manny Pacquiao, Scott Pemberton, Juan Diaz, Carl Thompson, Kassim Ouma, Kermit Cintron

Best Tiny Man In Elevator Shoes
Ivan Calderon

Rip-Off-The-Public Non-Effort Of The Year
Michael Moorer (vs. Eliseo Castillo)
Roy Jones (vs. Glen Johnson)
Zab Judah (vs. Rafael Pineda)

Steve Martin Arrow-Through-Head Ridiculous Gimmick
The HBO *Boxing After Dark* "Ask Harold" segments (with computer-animated accompaniment) that play like a lame imitation of Max Kellerman's "To The Max"

Mando Muniz "If At First You Don't Succeed" Persistence Award
Glen Johnson, Injin Chi, Manny Siaca, Katsushige Kawashima

Yogi Berra "It's Not Over Till It's Over" Resiliency Award
Juan Manuel Marquez (D 12 Manny Pacquiao)
Brian Minto (KO 10 Vinny Maddalone)
Christian Cruz (KO 9 Enrique Ornelas)
Robbie Peden (KO 5 Nate Campbell)
Lamon Brewster (KO 5 Wladimir Klitschko)

Facial Monstrosity Of The Year Golden Enswell
Juan Lazcano (vs. Jose Luis Castillo)

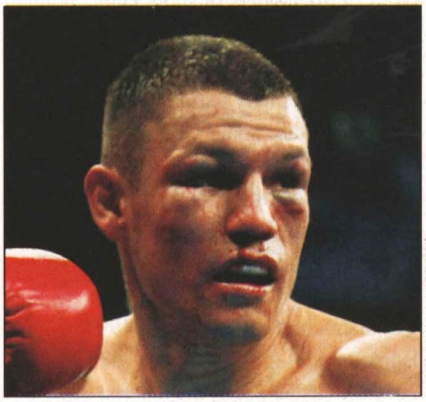


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Lazcano was a mess after 12 rounds with Castillo

Dave Tiberi Disappearing Fighter Award
Byron Mitchell, Derrick Gainer

Emile Griffith "Steady If Unspectacular" Trophy
John Ruiz, Carlos Hernandez, Beibis Mendoza, Ivan Calderon

Gerry Cooney Proper Pigmentation Award
Andrew Golota

"BEST FIGHTER" POLL

A SURVEY OF THE EXPERTS

This past year in boxing was like 366 days on a swivel. Just when you thought the year would move in one direction, it kept turning in another. Surprises abounded, further confusing the boxing landscape. It didn't matter whether it was Roy Jones getting kayoed twice, or Oscar De La Hoya writhing in pain on the canvas, looking anything but golden. Something was always changing the course of boxing.

For years, those two stellar performers remained constants in THE RING'S annual pound-for-pound best fighter poll. But Roy Jones just isn't Roy Jones anymore. Jones, last year's top fighter, failed to make the list this year for the first time since 1991. It marks the first time that a previous top finisher did not return to the pound-for-pound list the following year since Ray Leonard held the top spot in 1982 and, due to a temporary retirement, wasn't on the list in '83.

For De La Hoya, it's the first time he's been excluded from the pound-for-pound list since '94, just two years into his pro career.

"Think about it, we're going into 2005 and Roy Jones, Oscar De La Hoya, Lennox Lewis, and Felix Trinidad aren't world champions or titleholders of some kind," pointed out *USA Today* boxing writer Dan Rafael. "Guys like Trinidad, De La Hoya, Lewis, and Jones ruled boxing for at least a decade. That's amazing to me. This year definitely marked the changing of the guard."

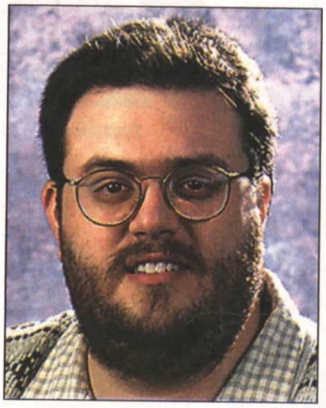
So let's talk about who *is* on the list. After years and years of struggle, Bernard Hopkins has finally broken through to be proclaimed by boxing experts as the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world. And "The Executioner" made his point emphatically, becoming only the third fighter ever to be selected as a unanimous top choice by the panel of experts. The only other fighters to earn that distinction were Jones in 1999 and Marvelous Marvin Hagler, Hopkins' idol growing up, in 1985.

This year's panel of experts: *USA Today* boxing writer Dan Rafael, *Herald News* (New Jersey) boxing writer Keith Idec, Hall of Fame trainer and manager Emanuel Steward, junior welterweight contender Ricky Hatton, former world junior featherweight champion Paulie Ayala, HBO blow-by-blow announcer Jim Lampley, Fox Sports Net boxing analyst Max Kellerman, ESPN2 *Friday Night Fights* blow-by-blow announcer Joe Tessitore, and radio host and veteran boxing analyst Rich Marotta.

To compile the standings, we awarded points for each vote a fighter received: 15 points for a first place vote, 12 for a second-place vote, nine for a third-place vote, seven for a fourth-place vote, six for a fifth-place vote, five for a sixth-place vote, four for a seventh-place vote, three for an eighth-place vote, two for a ninth-place vote, and one for a 10th-place vote.

Bernard Hopkins bears in on Oscar De La Hoya

DAN RAFAEL



1. Bernard Hopkins
2. Floyd Mayweather
3. Kostya Tszyu
4. Winky Wright
5. Marco Antonio Barrera
6. Erik Morales
7. Juan Manuel Marquez
8. Manny Pacquiao
9. Rafael Marquez
10. Felix Trinidad

"The reason Hopkins is number-one is because he has a lot of accomplishments over a long period of time. Hopkins is an easy choice. But if Mayweather can stay out of trouble, he's number-one-in-waiting. Excluding Glen Johnson and Antonio Tarver were my toughest choices. If I was extending my list by another two or three guys, I'd certainly think about including them."

KEITH IDEC

1. Bernard Hopkins
2. Floyd Mayweather
3. Kostya Tszyu
4. Winky Wright
5. Manny Pacquiao
6. Marco Antonio Barrera
7. Erik Morales
8. Rafael Marquez
9. Diego Corrales
10. Vitali Klitschko

"Hopkins dominated Trinidad and beat De La Hoya and hasn't lost since 1993. I think Floyd is the most skilled fighter in boxing, but Bernard deserves it because of his longevity. I had a hard time leaving Antonio Tarver off, because technically he lost to Glen Johnson, but he did make history by beating Roy Jones. Klitschko has been the most spectacular heavyweight in the last two years."

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Floyd Mayweather stings DeMarcus Corley

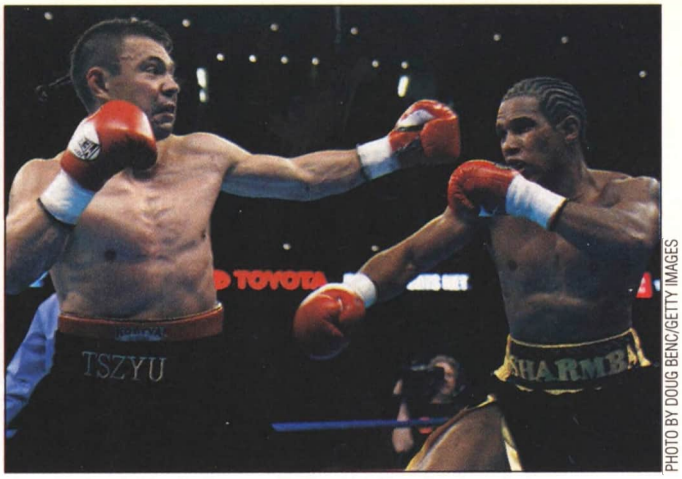


PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

Kostya Tszyu measures Sharmba Mitchell

EMANUEL STEWARD

1. Bernard Hopkins
2. Floyd Mayweather
3. Winky Wright
4. Marco Antonio Barrera
5. Kostya Tszyu
6. Felix Trinidad
7. Miguel Cotto
8. Ricky Hatton
9. Glen Johnson
10. Vitali Klitschko

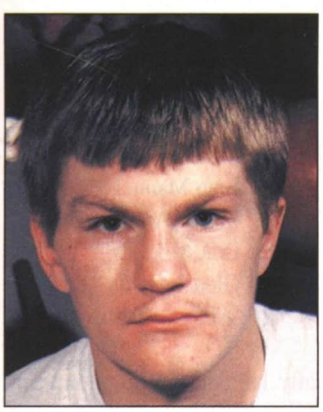
"I picked this list based on guys who fight consistently. I'm not that high on Erik Morales; he's too inconsistent for me. He has to have more consistent performances, which is why I have Miguel Cotto so high, because he's been so consistent. I put Hatton in there for the same reason. Johnson has been fighting top competition and it's been his performances against quality guys that got my attention."

PAULIE AYALA

1. Bernard Hopkins
2. Floyd Mayweather
3. Marco Antonio Barrera
4. Kostya Tszyu
5. Erik Morales
6. Felix Trinidad
7. Winky Wright
8. Diego Corrales
9. Miguel Cotto
10. Vitali Klitschko

"Hopkins is number one because he's had such a long reign over the middleweight division and he's beaten De La Hoya and Trinidad. As for Barrera and Morales, they have wins over each other. Boxing is changing, but you still have a couple of veterans who are hanging tough. I wouldn't be surprised if a 50 percent change on the list comes this time next year."

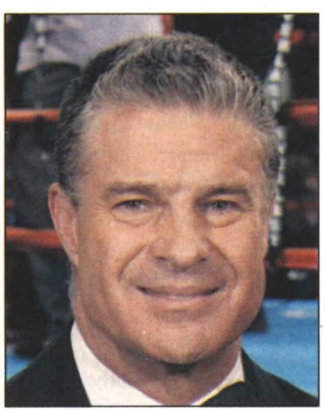
RICKY HATTON



1. Bernard Hopkins
2. Winky Wright
3. Kostya Tszyu
4. Marco Antonio Barrera
5. Floyd Mayweather
6. Glen Johnson
7. Manny Pacquiao
8. Erik Morales
9. Joe Calzaghe
10. Felix Trinidad

"Hopkins, with his win over De La Hoya and his number of middleweight title defenses, is number one, and Wright's victories over Mosley put him right there. Glen Johnson was a tough decision, because there are people out there who feel there are a lot of fighters with more ability than him. But he beat Roy Jones and Antonio Tarver. That's incredible."

JIM LAMPLEY



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4. Winky Wright
5. Marco Antonio Barrera
6. Felix Trinidad
7. Erik Morales
8. Rafael Marquez
9. Manny Pacquiao
10. Cory Spinks

"I give the edge to Hopkins simply because he's been doing it longer than anybody else. Mayweather and Hopkins both have strong arguments. Mayweather needs another fight or two against top-notch opposition to step up into that number-one spot. I picked these 10 because they've accomplished so much overall in their careers."

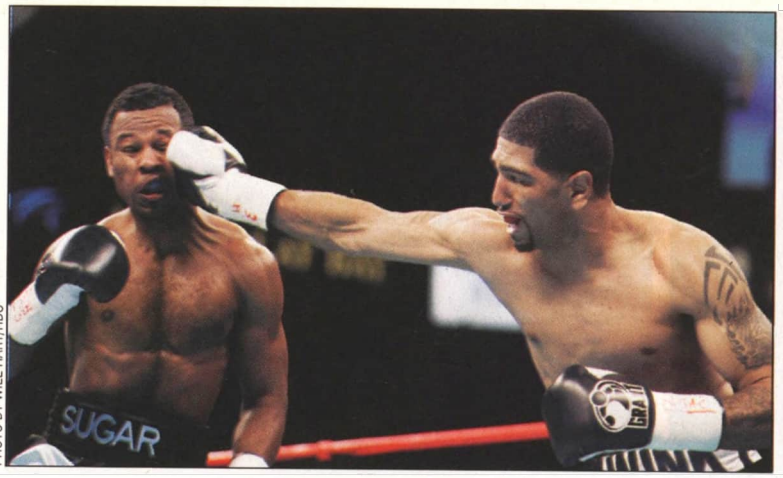


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Winky Wright connects on Shane Mosley

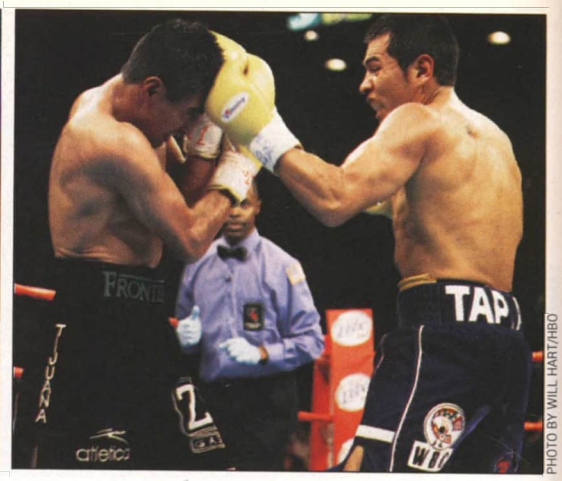


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

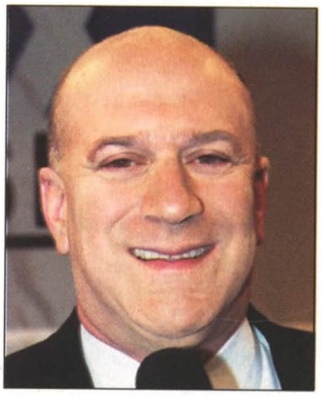
Marco Antonio Barrera punishes Erik Morales

MAX KELLERMAN

1. Bernard Hopkins
2. Floyd Mayweather
3. Kostya Tszyu
4. Manny Pacquiao
5. Juan Manuel Marquez
6. Winky Wright
7. James Toney
8. Rafael Marquez
9. Antonio Tarver
10. Jose Luis Castillo

"Hopkins is the obvious choice at number one; he beats everyone. Mayweather has only ever come close to losing once, and that was to Castillo, who's beaten everyone else. Kostya just dominates the best division in boxing, and Pacquiao destroyed Barrera. I justify putting Tarver in because I think Tarver won the Johnson fight."

RICH MAROTTA



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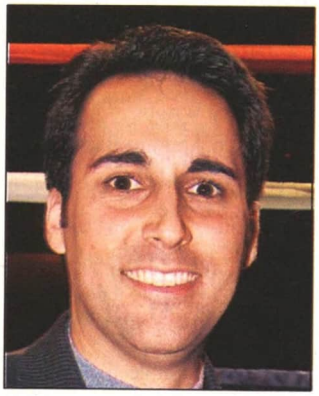
9. Diego Corrales
10. Jose Luis Castillo

"I would have given more serious thought to Mayweather as the number-one guy if he fought more often. I think Hopkins deserves to be number one based on his body of work and what he did to Oscar De La Hoya. Kostya Tszyu and Winky Wright are close to the top two, but a notch below. A year ago, I wouldn't have put Barrera there, and Corrales grew tremendously as a fighter."

JOE TESSITORE



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9. Marco Antonio Barrera
10. Erik Morales

"I have Kostya all the way up at number two on my list behind Hopkins. He annihilated Sharmba Mitchell. Until Floyd shows me something more at 140, I will not have him ahead of Kostya. Hopkins is still at the top. There is no argument there. I didn't list Glen Johnson or Antonio Tarver. I don't believe they belong ahead of any of the aforementioned names."

THE RING

1. Bernard Hopkins
2. Floyd Mayweather
3. Kostya Tszyu
4. Winky Wright
5. Manny Pacquiao
6. Juan Manuel Marquez
7. Marco Antonio Barrera
8. Erik Morales
9. Glen Johnson
10. Antonio Tarver

"Hopkins, nearing age 40, finally lands atop the pound-for-pound list. He's toiled in the shadows of superstars Oscar De La Hoya and Roy Jones for most of his career, but that's no longer the case now that he's knocked out De La Hoya and outlasted Jones. The order in the middle of the list was tricky, but as good a year as Barrera had, we just couldn't justify ranking him ahead of Pacquiao."

THE RESULTS

1. Bernard Hopkins—150 points
2. Floyd Mayweather—111
3. Kostya Tszyu—88
4. Winky Wright—70
5. Marco Antonio Barrera—52
6. Manny Pacquiao—38
7. Erik Morales—26
8. Juan Manuel Marquez—25
9. Felix Trinidad—22
10. Diego Corrales—11 (tie)
10. Rafael Marquez—11 (tie)

ALSO RECEIVING VOTES

Glen Johnson—9
Miguel Cotto—6
Jose Luis Castillo—5
James Toney—4
Ricky Hatton—3
Vitali Klitschko—3
Antonio Tarver—3
Joe Calzaghe—2
Cory Spinks—1

2003 POLL

1. Roy Jones—142 points
2. Bernard Hopkins—114
3. Floyd Mayweather—97
4. Shane Mosley—53
5. Kostya Tszyu—48
6. Oscar De La Hoya—45
7. Manny Pacquiao—38
8. James Toney—35
9. Erik Morales—31
10. Lennox Lewis—22

2002 POLL

1. Roy Jones—135
2. Oscar De La Hoya—89
3. Marco Antonio Barrera—78 (tie)
3. Vernon Forrest—78 (tie)
3. Bernard Hopkins—78 (tie)
6. Floyd Mayweather—45
7. Lennox Lewis—43
8. Kostya Tszyu—42
9. Erik Morales—25
10. Shane Mosley—13

2001 POLL

1. Shane Mosley—132
2. Roy Jones—108
3. Bernard Hopkins—98
4. Floyd Mayweather—77
5. Marco Antonio Barrera—44
6. Oscar De La Hoya—40
7. Felix Trinidad—39
8. Kostya Tszyu—34
9. Lennox Lewis—23
10. Ricardo Lopez—22

2000 POLL

1. Felix Trinidad—126
2. Shane Mosley—123
3. Roy Jones—109
4. Oscar De La Hoya—43
5. Floyd Mayweather—39
6. Naseem Hamed—37
7. Ricardo Lopez—35
8. Diego Corrales—33
9. Bernard Hopkins—32
10. Lennox Lewis—31

1999 POLL

1. Roy Jones—150
2. Oscar De La Hoya—85
3. Floyd Mayweather—78
4. Shane Mosley—68 (tie)
4. Felix Trinidad—68 (tie)
6. Mark Johnson—47 (tie)
6. Ricardo Lopez—47 (tie)
8. Erik Morales—21
9. Bernard Hopkins—16
10. Fernando Vargas—15

1998 POLL

1. Roy Jones—141
2. Oscar De La Hoya—123
3. Felix Trinidad—67
4. Shane Mosley—65
5. Evander Holyfield—55
6. Mark Johnson—45
7. Naseem Hamed—33
8. Ricardo Lopez—23
9. Floyd Mayweather—19
10. Pernell Whitaker—14

1997 POLL

1. Oscar De La Hoya—123
2. Roy Jones—117
3. Ricardo Lopez—83
4. Evander Holyfield—80
5. Felix Trinidad—65
6. Pernell Whitaker—37
7. Naseem Hamed—28
8. Mark Johnson—22 (tie)
8. Junior Jones—22 (tie)
10. Johnny Tapia—18

1996 POLL

1. Roy Jones—123
2. Oscar De La Hoya—107
3. Pernell Whitaker—92
4. Evander Holyfield—64
5. Felix Trinidad—59
6. Ricardo Lopez—56
7. Terry Norris—28
8. Ike Quartey—21
9. Azumah Nelson—12
10. Yuri Arbachakov—11

1995 POLL

1. Roy Jones—138
2. Pernell Whitaker—126
3. Oscar De La Hoya—74
4. Felix Trinidad—59
5. Marco Antonio Barrera–48
6. Riddick Bowe—44
7. Ricardo Lopez—37
8. Julio Cesar Chavez—18
9. Ike Quartey—16
10. Naseem Hamed—12

1994 POLL

1. Pernell Whitaker—130
2. Roy Jones—129
3. Frankie Randall—53
4. Ricardo Lopez—45
5. Orlando Canizales—39
6. Chiquita Gonzalez—38
7. James Toney—36
8. Gerald McClellan—33
9. Felix Trinidad—29
10. Kevin Kelley—28

1993 POLL

1. Pernell Whitaker—147
2. Julio Cesar Chavez—86
3. Terry Norris—84
4. James Toney—76
5. Michael Carbajal—39
6. Evander Holyfield—36
7. Buddy McGirt—28
8. Roy Jones—23
9. Orlando Canizales—22
10. Ricardo Lopez—21

1992 POLL

1. Julio Cesar Chavez—136
2. Terry Norris—91
3. Pernell Whitaker—85
4. Buddy McGirt—60
5. Riddick Bowe—45
6. Orlando Canizales—36
7. Azumah Nelson—34
8. Lennox Lewis—24
9. Julian Jackson—18
10. Roy Jones—15 (tie)
10. Mike McCallum—15 (tie)

1991 POLL

1. Julio Cesar Chavez—138
2. Pernell Whitaker—100
3. Evander Holyfield—78
4. Mike Tyson—55
5. Meldrick Taylor—48
6. Mike McCallum—38
7. Thomas Hearns—34
8. Khaosai Galaxy—25
9. Terry Norris—22
10. Simon Brown—21

1990 POLL

1. Julio Cesar Chavez—123
2. Pernell Whitaker—104
3. Mike Tyson—71
4. Meldrick Taylor—57
5. Buster Douglas—51
6. Simon Brown—27
7. Antonio Esparragoza—25
8. Michael Nunn—23
9. Evander Holyfield—21
10. Humberto Gonzalez—14

1989 POLL

1. Mike Tyson—147
2. Julio Cesar Chavez—91
3. Meldrick Taylor—61
4. Michael Nunn—60
5. Evander Holyfield—56
6. Pernell Whitaker—46
7. Ray Leonard—28
8. Jeff Fenech—27
9. Azumah Nelson—18
10. Marlon Starling—16

1988 POLL

1. Mike Tyson—144
2. Julio Cesar Chavez—118
3. Evander Holyfield—66
4. Ray Leonard—55
5. Jeff Fenech—44
6. Michael Nunn—33
7. Azumah Nelson—32
8. Jung Koo Chang—23
9. Buddy McGirt—21
10. Sumbu Kalambay—18

NO POLL IN 1987

1986 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler—138
2. Mike Tyson—92
3. Donald Curry—59
4. Thomas Hearns—52
5. Edwin Rosario—47
6. Azumah Nelson—45 (tie)
6. Michael Spinks—45 (tie)
8. Evander Holyfield—32
9. Julio Cesar Chavez—26
10. Hector Camacho—22

1985 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler—150
2. Hector Camacho—86
3. Michael Spinks—85
4. Donald Curry—78
5. Thomas Hearns—42
6. Barry McGuigan—32
7. Milton McCrory—25
8. Julio Cesar Chavez—22 (tie)
8. Pinklon Thomas—22 (tie)
10. Larry Holmes—21

1984 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler—112
2. Aaron Pryor—77
3. Larry Holmes—72
4. Eusebio Pedroza—66
5. Hector Camacho—50
6. Jeff Chandler—47 (tie)
6. Ray Leonard—47 (tie)
8. Michael Spinks—45
9. Thomas Hearns—34
10. Donald Curry—26

1983 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler—147
2. Aaron Pryor—93
3. Larry Holmes—91
4. Michael Spinks—66
5. Jeff Chandler—57
6. Thomas Hearns—45
7. Alexis Arguello—29
8. Wilfredo Gomez—28
9. Hector Camacho—24
10. Eusebio Pedroza—12

1982 POLL

1. Ray Leonard—142
2. Alexis Arguello—97
3. Marvin Hagler—76
4. Salvador Sanchez—72
5. Wilfred Benitez—68
6. Larry Holmes—61
7. Jeff Chandler—25
8. Eusebio Pedroza—18
9. Aaron Pryor—17
10. Thomas Hearns—14 (tie)
10. Dwight Muhammad Qawi—14 (tie)

1981 POLL

1. Thomas Hearns—116
2. Ray Leonard—108
3. Marvin Hagler—76
4. Larry Holmes—75
5. Alexis Arguello—62
6. Wilfredo Gomez—58
7. Eddie Mustafa Muhammad—28
8. Matthew Saad Muhammad—24
9. Wilfred Benitez—18
10. Roberto Duran—13 (tie)
10. Aaron Pryor—13 (tie)

1980 POLL

1. Roberto Duran—96
2. Ray Leonard—93
3. Wilfredo Gomez—88
4. Danny Lopez—65
5. Pipino Cuevas—54
6. Alexis Arguello—40
7. Larry Holmes—32
8. Wilfred Benitez—26
9. Vito Antuofermo—25 (tie)
9. Matthew Saad Muhammad—25 (tie)

SUMMARY

HEAVYWEIGHTS

Vitali Klitschko KO 8 Danny Williams
(Retains World Title)
Corrie Sanders KO 2 Alexei Varakin
Sergei Liakhovich W 10 Dominick Guinn
Samuel Peter KO 2 Jeremy Williams
Michael Moorer KO 9 Vassiliy Jirov
Luan Krasniqi D 12 Timo Hoffman
Ruslan Chagaev KO 2 Tommy Connelly
Rob Calloway KO 2 Jeff Pegues
Fabio Moli W 12 Mariano Ocampo
Eddie Chambers W 10 Louis Monaco
Sultan Ibragimov KO 6 James Walton
Timor Ibragimov W 12 Billy Douglas
Roman Greenberg W 10 Julius Francis
Kendrick Releford W 10 Garing Lane
Bob Mirovic W 10 Colin Wilson
Taurus Sykes KO 2 Onebo Maxime

PHOTO BY GREGG MARINANE

Heavyweight Jason Estrada turns pro with a win over Joseph Reyes

George Arias KO 3 Daniel Frank
Taras Bidenko KO 7 Konstantin Onofrei
Terry Smith W 6 Demetrice King
Vinny Maddalone W 6 Ronnie Smith
Jean-Francois Bergeron W 6 Reynaldo Minus
B.J. Flores W 6 Tom Cameron
Rudiger May W 8 Roman Bugaj
Oleg Platov KO 1 Ihar Shukala
Chazz Witherspoon KO 1 James Daniel
Jason Estrada W 4 Joseph Reyes

CRUISERWEIGHTS

Stipe Drews W 8 Ovill McKenzie
Guillermo Jones KO 1 Antonio Berroa
David Haye KO 1 Valery Semishkur
Felix Cora KO 6 James Elizalde
Michael Simms KO 8 Joseph Kiwanuka
Lou Del Valle W 8 Raymond McLamore
Mark Hobson W 12 Bruce Scott
Laudelino Barros KO 3 Marco Duarte
Chad Van Sickle W 10 Gary Gomez
Olando Rivera KO 3 Rico Cason
Danny Santiago KO 1 James Brock
Danny Santiago W 8 Ronald Boddie
Krzysztof Wlodarczyk KO 7 Bruce Ozbek
Emmanuel Chukwu KO 1 Imamu Mayfield
Fabio Tuiach KO 2 Branko Gacevic
Richard Paige W 4 Gilbert Zaragoza
Vonda Ward KO 4 Marsha Valley

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

Glen Johnson W 12 Antonio Tarver
(Wins World Title)
Julio Gonzalez KO 8 David Telesco
Pietro Aurino Tech. Win 8 Joseph Marwa
Eric Lucas KO 2 Tony Menefee
Librado Andrade KO 4 Thomas Reid
Prince Badi Ajamu W 12 Greg Wright
Kirino Garcia D 12 Derrick Whitley
Lucian Bute KO 4 Dingaan Thobela
Dawid Kostecki W 10 Dhafir Smith

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Jeff Lacy W 12 Omar Sheika
(Retains IBF Title)
Markus Beyer W 12 Yoshinori Nishizawa
(Retains WBC Title)

Felix Sturm KO 3 Hassine Cherifi
Antwun Echols KO 7 Jameel Wilson
Sam Soliman KO 7 Jose Clavero
Nader Hamdan KO 2 Arama Tabuai
Sergey Tatevosyan W 10
Victor Geratshenko
Otis Grant W 12 Henry Porras
Robert Stieglitz W 12 Alexander Zaitsev
Mohammad Said W 8 Danilo Haussler
Darrell Woods KO 5 Max Heyman
Lansana Diallo W 8 Branko Sobot
Joel Burke KO 8 Daniel Lovett
Enrique Ornelas W 8 Giorbis Barthelemy
Gabriel Holguin W 8 Frankie Sanchez
Jesus Gonzales KO 4 Jorge Garcia
Andre Ward KO 2 Chris Molina

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Jermain Taylor W 12 William Joppy
Manuel Gomez W 10 Christopher Henry
Chad Dawson KO 7 Carl Daniels
Tarvis Simms W 8 Carlos Bojorquez
Francisco Mora KO 3 Jorge Perez
Wayne Alexander W 10 Delroy Mellis
Joachime Alcine KO 1 Stephane Ouellet
Shannan Taylor KO 2 Sakda Sorpakdi
Adam Green KO 6 Alex Hilton
Anthony Thompson KO 4 Jonathan Corn

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Mihaly Kotai KO 7 Manning Galloway
Jose Celaya KO 2 Maurice Brantley
Sam Garr W 6 Benji Singleton
Walter Matthysse KO 2 Silvio Rojas
Toshiharu Kaneyama KO 4 Ade Alfons
Hamlet Petrosian KO 4 Simone Rotolo
Ian MacKillop D 6 Anthony Ivory
Nick Casal KO 1 Jesse Curry
Andre Berto KO 3 Michael Robinson

WELTERWEIGHTS

Ben Tackie KO 2 Jonathan Nelson
Sven Paris W 12 Walter Saporiti
Al Gonzales W 10 Roberto Ortega
Chad Bennett KO 2
Singsamut Eausampan
Masa Bakirov D 10 Hiroshi Yamaguchi
Kendall Holt W 6 Juan Carlos Escobar
Lamont Peterson W 4 Daniel Craycraft

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

Miguel Cotto KO 6 Randall Bailey
Ricky Hatton KO 10 Ray Oliveira
DeMarcus Corley W 10 Darryl Tyson
Acelino Freitas W 10 Fernando Saucedo
David Diaz KO 9 Jaime Rangel
Carlos Maussa W 12 Arturo Morua
Juan Urango KO 2 Ubaldo Hernandez
Paul Malignaggi Tech. Win 7
Sandro Casamonica
Craig Weber D 12 Rogelio Castaneda
Norio Kimura W 10 Hiroyuki Ioku
Mike Arnaoutis KO 3 Jauquin Gallardo
Cristian Bejarano W 6 Rob Frankel
Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. KO 2 Eliseo Urias
Anthony Peterson W 4 Jose Ramon
Willy Blain W 4 Piotr Niesporek
Chad Aquino W 4 David Hernandez
Sumya Anani W 10 Stephanie Jaramillo
Mia St. John KO 1 Janae Archuleta

LIGHTWEIGHTS

Jose Luis Castillo W 12 Joel Casamayor
(Retains World Title)
Carlos Hernandez W 10
Juan Carlos Ramirez
Ebo Elder KO 12 Courtney Burton
Steve Forbes W 8 Ricardo Barajas
Koba Gogoladze W 10 Roque Cassiani
Humberto Soto KO 10 Ismael Gonzales
Laszlo Bognar W 12 David Kiilu
Koji Arisawa W 10 Koji Ozawa
Chikashi Inada KO 3 Evert Moreno

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS

Alex Arthur W 12 Nazareno Ruiz
Janos Nagy W 12 Julio Pablo Chacon
Carlos Navarro KO 11 Agapito Sanchez
Oscar Leon W 6 Paulino Villalobos
Willie Limond W 10 Alberto Lopez
Vicente Mosquera W Disq. 9
Esteban Morales
Leva Kirakosyan KO 1 Carl Johanneson
Jason Litzau KO 6 Juan Suazo
Elio Rojas KO 3 Francisco Melendez

FEATHERWEIGHTS

Manny Pacquiao KO 4
Fahsung 3K-Battery
(Retains World Title)
Rocky Juarez KO 2 Guty Espadas
Chris John Tech. Draw 4 Jose Rojas
Gabula Vabaza KO 8 Mkuseli Kondile
Fahprakorb Rakkiatgym KO 2
Alwyn Clerino
Robert Guerrero KO 4 Cesar Figueroa
Valdemir Pereira W 12 Pastor Maurin
Adrian Valdez KO 3 Hector Marquez
Walter Estrada KO 3 Jose Miranda
Masanori Sugita W 10 Jake Verano
Akihiro Kanai KO 4
Saknarong Sor Vorapin
Miguel Roman KO 10
Cuauhtemoc Gomez
Angelo Torres W 12 Alvin Brown

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS

Sergio Manuel Medina KO 1 Victor Godoi
Eidy Moya W 8 Eduardo Julio
Akihiko Nago W 10 Setsuo Segawa

BANTAMWEIGHTS

Dimitri Kirilov W 10 Marcel Kasimov
Ricardo Cordoba KO 12 Carlos Meza
Jose DeJesus Lopez W 10 Edison Torres

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

Martin Castillo W 12 Alexander Munoz
(Wins WBA Title)
Hussein Hussein KO 5 Yoppie Benu
Gerson Guerrero KO 6 Jair Jimenez
Damaen Kelly W 12 Jason Booth
Simon Ramoni KO 5 Lunga Ntontela
Komrit Lukkuongmuekol W 12 Jun Talape
Alex Becerra W 10 Valentin Leon

FLYWEIGHTS

Vic Darchinyan KO 11 Irene Pacheco
(Wins IBF Title)
Omar Narvaez KO 5 Marcos Obregon
Roberto Vasquez KO 1 Farid Cassiani
Brian Viloria KO 7 Angel Priolo
Jonathan Aguilar W 12 William DeSousa
Lee Haskins KO 3 Delroy Spencer
Cesar Lopez W 10 Alejandro Moreno
Koki Kameda KO 2
Nopadetchlek Chuwatana

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS

Jorge Arce KO 3 Juan Centeno
(Retains WBC Title)
Chana Porpaoin W 6 Philip Parcon
Sizwe Sinyabi KO 10
Thembelani Maphuma
Javier Tello W 12 Angelo Dottin
Katsunari Takayama KO 3
Namchai Thaksinisarn

STRAWWEIGHTS

Isaac Bustos KO 4 Eagle Kyowa
(Wins WBC Title)
Satoshi Kogumazaka W 10
Junichiro Kaneda
Carlos Melo W 12 Abraham Irias

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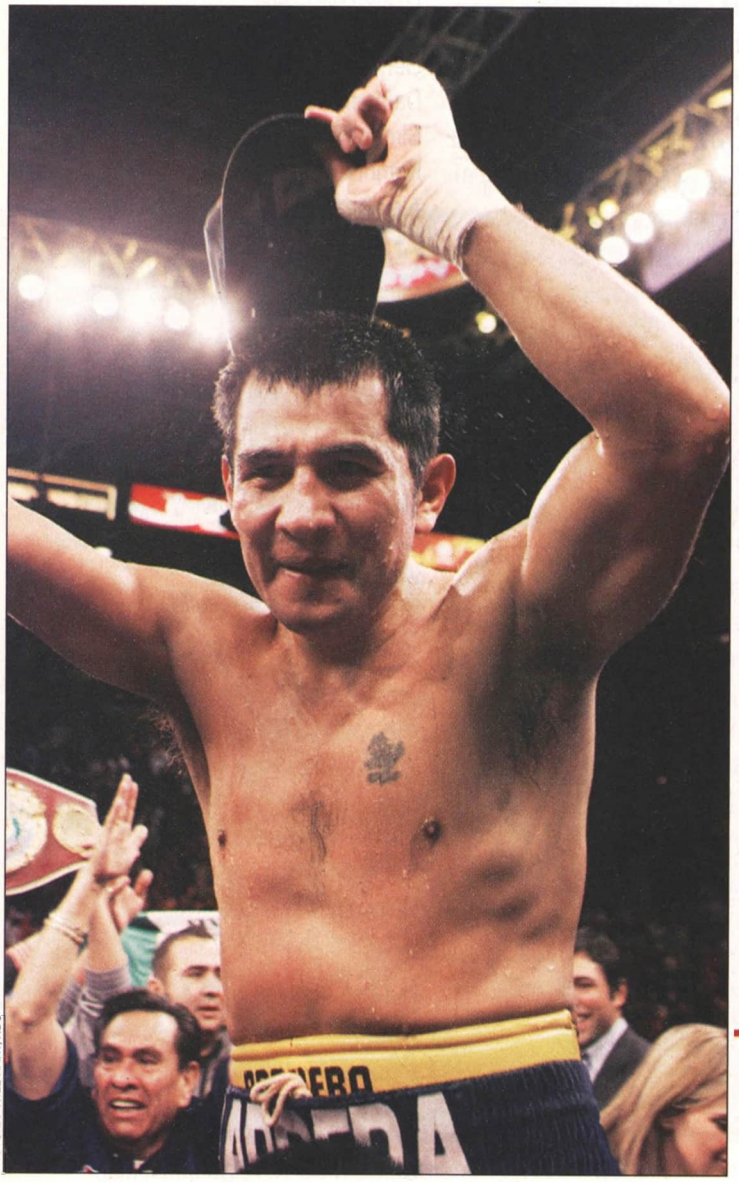

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

It was supposed to be Erik Morales' night. He was the younger fighter, the bigger fighter, the fighter on the hot streak. After two battles that were almost too close to call, this rubber match was supposed to be definitive, and it was supposed to propel Morales to even greater things.

Unfortunately for Morales, there are no sure things when Marco Antonio Barrera stands in the opposite corner. Morales' best success in the first two fights came when Barrera opted to box early in the second bout, so Barrera wisely leapt to the attack from the get-go this time, delivering an aggressive yet smart performance that far exceeded what most observers thought he was capable of. Through six rounds, it was looking like a rout, and even when Morales staged a determined late rally, it wasn't quite enough. Barrera emerged with a deserved majority decision.

It has been said that when Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier fought for the third time, they were fighting for the championship of each other. Same with Morales and Barrera. Unless there's a fourth fight, Barrera has earned the right to call himself the champion of this rivalry.

• • • •

Marco Antonio Barrera

RINGSIDE REPORTS

Jose Luis Castillo W 12 Joel Casamayor

Las Vegas, Nevada: This bout began like a bullfight that goes according to the matador's plan, but as the fight wore on, the matador stopped making the bull miss, and the bull started making the matador fight. The rounds were close throughout, but Castillo—the bull—came on strong enough to capture a split decision over Casamayor and retain the world lightweight title at the Mandalay Bay Events Center.

Casamayor, 135 Miami, Florida, was in charge in the first couple of rounds as he moved effectively to score with his own punches while making the come-forward Castillo, 134½, Mexicali, Mexico, miss. Most of the middle rounds were hard to score as both fighters had their moments. In the fourth, Casamayor, a 1992 Olympic gold medalist and former junior lightweight titlist, repeatedly waited for Castillo to throw his straight right hand, then slipped to his left and countered with left hands. But between bursts of offense, Casamayor was doing quite a bit of retreating and holding, which didn't go over well with the crowd.

Castillo's nose was bleeding from the fourth round onward, but it did not stop the champion from coming forward. Castillo, 30, has shown in the past an ability to grow stronger as a fight progresses. In the second half of the fight, the Mexican upped the pace and closed the distance. Castillo started landing solid right and left hooks to Casamayor's body that slowed him down.

Meanwhile, Casamayor, 33, put his smart boxing skills to use by moving to his left and right, slipping punches, and countering back. He was showing some of the techniques he had picked up from working with legend Roberto Duran, who had been brought in to help with Casamayor's training camp.

Castillo, however, was doing the most damage in the final three rounds as he kept a fading Casamayor still and hit him with uppercuts and left hooks to the head. In the last minute of the fight, a left uppercut to Casamayor's jaw sent his mouthpiece flying across the ring. After a mostly ugly first two-thirds of the fight, it became entertaining down the stretch—and it became the sort of fight Castillo needed it to become.

Judges Dr. James Jen Kin (USA) and Dave Moretti (USA) scored the fight 116-112 and 117-111, respectively, for Castillo, while Carol Castellano (USA) scored it 115-113 for Casamayor. THE RING tabbed it a 114-114 draw.

Casamayor, 31-3 (19), thought he had won the fight and hoped for a rematch, but also indicated he would be interested in a fight with Erik Morales. The Cuban defector has yet to be beaten decisively, as all three of his defeats have come via close decision.

Castillo, 51-6-1 (45), said, "He was difficult as expected, but by the eighth and ninth rounds, I knew this was my fight." He said he hopes to fight Diego Corrales, THE RING's number-one contender, in May.

The referee was Vic Drakulich (USA).

Television: Showtime

Promoter: Top Rank in association with Cedric Kushner Promotions

(12-4-04)

Wayne McCullough

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/SHOWTIME

Castillo pressures Casamayor en route to narrow win

Samuel Peter KO 2 Jeremy Williams

Las Vegas, Nevada: If you want to become a serious contender in any division, you must have a tough test first. That was the plan for Peter when he faced veteran Williams. However, it didn't turn out to be much of a test at all, as Peter kayoed Williams in less than two rounds at the Mandalay Bay Events Center, vaulting himself into the heavyweight picture without proving much besides the fact that he's a tremendous puncher.

Peter had predicted a second-round knockout beforehand, but afterward, he admitted, "I didn't really know if I was going to knock Jeremy Williams out. I didn't watch his tapes. I don't know anything about him."

The first round started with the solidly built Peter, 247, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria, walking straight forward, looking for that one big shot. But it was the more experienced Williams, 226, Long Beach, California, who was controlling the rhythm of the fight, flashing faster hands, and making the young Nigerian miss a lot of his shots.

At the end of the first round, Peter, 24, landed a grazing right hand that seemed to effect Williams momentarily, possibly stealing the round. One judge gave Williams the round, while the other two gave it to Peter, presumably on the basis of that one effective punch.

Any discussions of scoring became irrelevant about 20 seconds into the second round. Williams bent to his left, trying to move away from Peter's shots, but as he came up—with his hands down—Peter

threw a wide left hook that caught Williams clean on the chin.

Williams, 41-5-1 (36), was out as he fell to the canvas, where he banged the back of his head hard on the ring floor. Referee Toby Gibson (USA) started counting, but when he saw Williams was not going to recover, he called the fight off midway through the count at just 27 seconds of the round. Williams was down for several minutes and was surrounded by the doctor and commission members.

"I didn't see the shot he hit me with," Williams said after he regained his senses. "I couldn't tell you what it was." A disappointed Williams, 32, said he would consider retirement after the devastating loss snapped a seven-fight unbeaten streak.

Peter, 21-0 (18), boldly announced, "I want to fight Vitali Klitschko." That would be quite a leap, but certainly this win improved Peter's standing in this wide-open heavyweight division.

Television: Showtime

Promoter: Top Rank in association with Cedric Kushner Promotions and Duva Boxing

(12-4-04)

Wayne McCullough

Oscar Larios W 12 Nedal Hussein

Las Vegas, Nevada: During most of the fights we've seen Larios in, he has stood and traded blows with his opponent. But against Hussein, he was forced to box a little more on the back foot—and it suited him just fine. At the MGM Grand Garden Arena on the Marco Antonio Barrera-Erik Morales III undercard, Larios boxed intelligently and kept his hands moving to win a unanimous decision over Hussein and successfully defend the WBC super bantamweight title for the fifth time.

The Mexican titleholder said after the fight that he had been forced to box rather than bang it out with Hussein after he felt the Australian's power. That same power gave Manny Pacquiao a scary night back in 2000, before Pacquiao rallied for a controversial stoppage—the only loss of Hussein's 37-fight career coming into this title challenge.

Larios, 121, was the aggressor in the first round, while Hussein, 122, held his hands high to try to block Larios' shots. The second round was another story, as Hussein started unleashing his vaunted left hook to the body. This was the round in which Larios was convinced that his best bet was to avoid trading punches with the powerful Aussie.

By the third, Larios, 28, was back in charge, outworking Hussein by large punch margins. He momentarily hurt Hussein, 26, with a good straight right to the body in the fourth. Hussein grew discouraged and failed to adjust his game plan. He marched forward with his hands high, not throwing many punches, and allowed Larios to pick him off with shots as he plowed ahead.

The second half of the fight was a bit closer as the fighters stepped up the action slightly, but Larios was the one throwing and landing at a ratio of about three-to-one. With 30 seconds to go in the final round, Hussein, 36-2 (22), landed his best headshot of the fight—a clean right hand to Larios' face—but he was too far behind on the cards for it to make a difference.

The three judges at ringside scored unanimously for Larios, 54-3-1 (35). Carol Castellano (USA) scored the bout 118-110, Dalby Shirley (USA) saw it 119-109, and Chuck Hassett (USA) had it a shutout at 120-108 (an odd scorecard considering that Hussein seemed to dominate the second round). THE RING scored it 117-111 for Larios. Referee Richard Steele (USA), working a title fight for the first time since coming out of retirement, didn't have much work to do as the fighters kept the bout clean.

"He demonstrated tonight that he has a lot of skills," said Larios' promoter, Oscar De La Hoya, referring to the titlist's tactical adaptability. "Larios is ready for anybody at 122 pounds. He will demonstrate over and over that he is the best 122-pound champion."

Television: HBO Pay-Per-View

Promoters: Top Rank, Golden Boy Promotions

(11-27-04)

Wayne McCullough

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Larios blasts challenger Hussein with a right hand

Rafael Marquez KO 8 Mauricio Pastrana

Las Vegas, Nevada: It was a rematch nobody was really asking for, but it turned out to be worth watching. When Marquez defended the IBF bantamweight title against Pastrana in October 2003, the Mexican boxed his way to a decision win. This time, Marquez, promising a knockout, survived some rough moments to break Pastrana down, bloodying his face and forcing his corner to retire him after the eighth round. It was the first time Pastrana had been stopped.

Colombian Pastrana is a tough little man who picked up his first belt in 1997 at 108 pounds by beating Michael Carbajal. As a bantamweight, he was giving away considerable natural size to Marquez at the MGM Grand Garden Arena. But he came to fight. Pastrana,

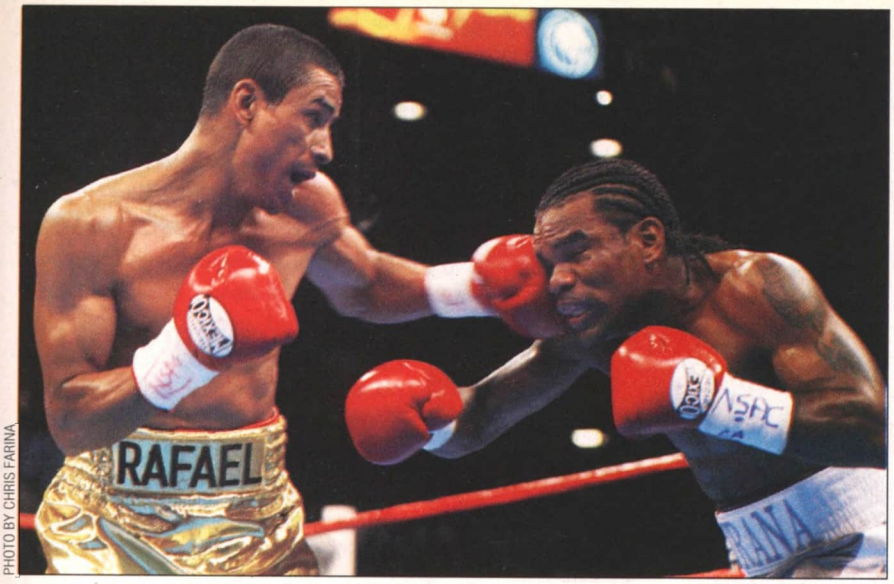

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Pastrana walks headlong into a Marquez hook

117, traded toe-to-toe with Marquez, 118, Mexico, in the opening round. But Marquez, who has knocked out the likes of Mark Johnson and Tim Austin, appreciated the invite and landed a left hook to Pastrana's body and then a brutal one to the head that shook the Columbian up.

Pastrana did a little better in the second round, and was beginning to counter Marquez' straight right with left hooks and Marquez' left hook with straight rights. It was still Marquez' round, though, and the third seemed to be headed the Mexican's way as well until a counter right hand from Pastrana landed on the chin and nearly floored the titleholder. Marquez pitched forward and held on, his legs momentarily gone, but he recovered quickly. At round's end, however, it was Pastrana who looked worse, his left eye cut by a headbutt and blood streaming down his face. Rounds four and five were both close, Pastrana giving a gutsy effort against the hard-punching Marquez.

Marquez, 29, started using short hooks inside in the sixth. Three solid left uppercuts to the head of Pastrana, 31, left him bleeding from the mouth, and though Marquez' left eye was swelling, he looked better than Pastrana, who was bleeding and sporting two swollen eyes.

By the seventh, the bout was becoming one-sided in Marquez' favor. Marquez, who carries one-punch knockout power in both hands, fought the eighth round as if he wanted to finish the fight. He landed a beautiful left-right-left combination to his opponent's face that badly rocked Pastrana, and got the better of an exciting exchange at the bell that left the crowd cheering wildly.

Between rounds eight and nine, Pastrana, 31-5-1 (21), looked defeated. He complained of pain in his left arm, and his corner decided their man had taken enough punishment. Marquez, 33-3 (30), was awarded a TKO victory for his fourth successful title defense.

"We will fight anybody at 118 pounds," Marquez said after the win.

Television: HBO Pay-Per-View

Promoters: Top Rank, Golden Boy Promotions

(11-27-04)

Wayne McCullough

Mikkel Kessler KO 8 Manny Siaca

Copenhagen, Denmark: Composed and clinical, Kessler, 168, delivered a masterful performance against a game but outclassed Siaca, 168, Toa Baja, Puerto Rico, to claim the WBA super middleweight title before 3,500 fans at Brondby Hallen in his hometown. It was Siaca's first defense of the belt he won last May from Australia's Anthony Mundine, who watched from ringside and lobbied immediately for first crack at the winner.

For the 25-year-old Dane, this was a breakthrough fight. His unbeaten record, 35-0 (27), has been built up against an unspectacular lineup of opponents with Dingaan Thobela, Craig Cummings, Julio Cesar Green, and Andre Thysse the most formidable he had faced prior to Siaca. But he was completely prepared, to the point where he dominated the fight after a fairly even opening round, not allowing Siaca, 18-5 (16), any encouragement. He got on top and stayed on top until Siaca's father, Manuel, who trains his son, motioned to Hall of Fame referee Stanley Christodoulou (South Africa) that the Puerto Rican titleholder, slumped sadly on his stool, could not come out for the eighth round.

By the second round, it was increasingly clear that the outcome would be painful for Siaca. Kessler began to measure him with his jab and hurt him with several rights to the body. The real clue, however, was that the 29-year-old Siaca could do nothing to make a dent in the Dane's armor, rendered almost impotent. This was a surprise given that he had floored Mundine on his way to a split decision victory over the Australian in Sydney and he had also floored Byron Mitchell in the final round of a split decision defeat against the American in 2001. Kessler's defensive work, slipping shots and blocking on the inside, was as impressive as his offensive capabilities.

It became a methodical job with Siaca sustaining a steady working-over. For every punch he landed, he took three or four in response, and they were hard shots, marking him up around his left eye and causing his nose to bleed heavily. He tried to force Kessler to stand and trade with him late in the fifth, and the Dane all too happily obliged him, but Kessler was not to be knocked out of his dominant stride.

A solid right hand rocked Siaca in the sixth. Pinned on the ropes, he was wilting badly, but his spirit stayed strong and he remained on his feet, using all his guile to keep Kessler at bay. But he could not keep him off in the seventh, taking another heavy right before slipping to the floor. Christodoulou did not rule it a knockdown. Siaca hit back with a right uppercut, but Kessler made him pay with telling combinations that took the remaining strength out of Siaca's body. He was shipping heavy punishment in his own corner when the bell intervened. A short conference between Siaca Sr. and Christodoulou between rounds signaled the end.

Mundine's hopes for a tilt at his old title took a knock when promoter Bettina Palle announced later that Kessler's stablemate, Mads Larsen, was the official challenger and Kessler would weigh up his options for a voluntary defense.

(11-12-04)

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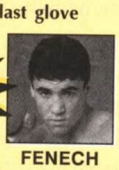

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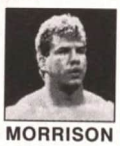

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Martin Castillo W 12 Alexander Munoz

PHOTO BY SUMIO YAMADA

Castillo's jab helps him take Munoz' title

Laredo, Texas: The slick-punching Castillo, 115, Hacienda, California, via Mexico, impressively seized the WBA super flyweight belt as he twice dropped the previously unbeaten Munoz, 115, Venezuela, and pounded out a unanimous decision over 12 heats at the Laredo Entertainment Center. Judges Ruben Garcia (USA) and Ray Hawkins (USA) both saw it 117-109, and Oren Shellenberger (USA) had it 116-110, all in favor of the technically excellent Castillo.

Castillo showed his intelligence and patience in outboxing and outclassing the highly touted puncher from Venezuela. Castillo took the initiative all the way by averting Munoz' big punches and countering with precision. In the fourth, the Mexican effectively shook up the defending titlist with crisp left hooks, swarmed over him with furious combinations, and floored him with a well-timed right. Castillo gamely mixed it up in the fifth, scoring with accurate combos against the wild-swinging Venezuelan. Munoz, who had won his belt in Japan and made all three of his defenses there, made the action in the sixth, but still found Castillo too elusive and fast to catch with anything noteworthy. The Mexican's defensive skill was superb against the kayo artist.

Munoz, 25, began to bleed from the inside of the mouth from the seventh onward. The eighth saw Castillo, 27, nearly send Munoz flying out of the ring with a wicked right to the face. The Venezuelan desperately attempted to turn the tables with his aggressiveness, but the Mexican hombre was smart enough to keep moving side-to-side and counter him with solid left hooks to the belly and face. Aware that he was behind on points, Munoz, 25-1 (24), stalked the faster challenger with roundhouse shots in the last three rounds, but Castillo, 27-1 (16), caught him with a vicious countering right to almost topple Munoz in the final session.

The referee was Laurence Cole (USA).

Television: Telefutura

Promoter: Top Rank

(12-3-04)

Joe Koizumi

Rocky Juarez KO 2 Guty Espadas

Atlantic City, New Jersey: The excitement Juarez created with one-punch knockouts of Antonio Diaz and David Murillo in 2003 had petered out in the wake of a trio of decision wins for the former Olympian in '04. And although the Texan was still undefeated and gradually climbing the featherweight rankings, he entered the ring at Bally's badly in need of a rousing victory to rekindle interest.

The man waiting for him in the opposite corner, former WBC 126-pound beltholder Espadas, proved the perfect foil.

For the first minute or so, it was a fairly even battle of jabs, but as the round progressed Juarez took over with left hooks and right hands. The 30-year-old Espadas, only two fights removed from a crushing knockout loss to Erik Morales, tried to keep up by working the body. But it was a misguided approach considering the punching power the shorter Juarez generates on the inside.

Juarez, 126, advanced steadily in the second, looking to catch Espadas, 125, with something big. He was slightly off target with several left hooks, and then fired a hybrid hook-uppercut that smashed into the Mexican's face and put him on the floor. Espadas, blood streaming from his nose, couldn't regain his feet in time and was counted out by referee Eddie Cotton (USA) at the 2:24 mark.

"I felt real confident," said Juarez after raising his record to 22-0 (15). "I just felt that I was going to catch him sooner or later."

Espadas, whose record fell to 38-7 (24), was taken to the hospital to be treated for a possible broken nose.

Juarez' promoter, Main Events, is trying to match him with Humberto Soto next, as a win would make Juarez the mandatory challenger for alphabet titleholder Injin Chi.

Television: ESPN2

Promoter: Main Events

(12-3-04)

Nigel Collins

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND

Juarez overwhelms former titlist Espadas

Sergei Liakhovich W 10 Dominick Guinn

Atlantic City, New Jersey: It wasn't all that long ago that Guinn was considered perhaps the best of the up-and-coming heavyweight hopefuls. Then came his disappointing decision loss to Monte Barrett in March 2004. Still, anyone can have an off night, and Guinn got another chance to get back into the title hunt when he was matched with Liakhovich on the Juarez-Espadas card at Bally's. But after 10 give-and-take rounds, it was the unheralded Liakhovich who went home the winner, while Guinn was left to ponder his future.

Both looked tight in the opening round, but when the punches began to fly in the second, Liakhovich, a soft-looking 240, got the better of it, banging home ponderous but hurtful-looking right hands to both the body and head. Guinn, 227, did manage a nice combination in the third, but was outworked and outpunched.

The fourth was a comparatively slow round, but in the fifth Guinn unloaded with the sort of barrage that originally got people excited about him. He opened the round by blasting Liakhovich with combinations to the head, handled it well when "The White Wolf" answered back with hard shots of his own, and then exploded again as the round drew to a close, staggering the Belarus-born bomber at the bell.

Inexplicably, Guinn failed to follow up his advantage in the sixth, and allowed the busier Liakhovich to take the play away with thudding rights to the body. Guinn, 29, did wake up long enough to rock his man with a right in the seventh, but his attack soon sputtered out when Liakhovich shook off the punch and kept coming.

It was Liakhovich's turn to impress in the eighth. He stayed on top of Guinn throughout the round, landing right uppercuts whenever he got inside, and late in the session he connected with a booming overhand right to Guinn's head.

Guinn, 25-2 (18), took the ninth on two of the three official scorecards, as Liakhovich appeared to be tiring. Even so, "The Southern Disaster" needed a big final round if he was to have a chance of salvaging the fight. He didn't get it. Liakhovich, who seemed to want it more, kept rumbling forward and landed several hefty rights to the head to win the round and the fight.

Judges Steve Weisfeld (USA) and Eugene Grant (USA) both scored it 96-94 in Liakhovich's favor, and Lynn Carter (USA) made it unanimous with a 97-93 tally. THE RING also had the 28-year-old Liakhovich winning, but by a narrower 96-95 margin.

How far Liakhovich, 22-1 (14), can go in today's depleted heavyweight division remains to be seen, but he's clearly strong, motivated, and capable of absorbing a good punch without falling apart. Guinn, on the hand, seems to run out of ambition when one of his big shots doesn't end the fight. He has a lot of the physical attributes, but seems to lack the passion and drive to succeed at the top level.

The referee was Randy Neumann (USA).
Television: ESPN2
Promoter: Main Events
(12-3-04)
Nigel Collins

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND

Uninspired Guinn absorbs a hook from Liakhovich

Ian Gardner W 12 Tokunbo Olajide

Las Vegas, Nevada: The 8,103 fans at the Mandalay Bay Events Center for the Winky Wright-Shane Mosley rematch probably expected these two once-beaten junior middleweights battling in a scheduled 12-round undercard bout to put on an entertaining fight, but instead all they got was a reason to boo from the first round to the last. Awkward southpaw Gardner moved around the ring while Olajide walked forward, throwing few punches. Virtually nothing happened, but Olajide's hesitance to let his hands go allowed Gardner to leave with the decision.

Gardner, 153, Brockton, Massachusetts, via Toronto, Ontario, was slightly the taller of the two and had won 15 straight since a controversial loss against Peter Manfredo in 2001 in only his third pro fight. Olajide, 154, New York, New York, via Vancouver, British Columbia, had won three straight fights since being upset against Epifanio Mendoza back in October 2002. In that fight, he fractured his leg as he suffered a first-round knockdown. But Olajide came into this fight the favorite and the hotter prospect.

From the start, Gardner, 23, began using his right jab to keep Olajide, 27, on the outside. Olajide tried to pressure the slick Gardner throughout the fight, but found it difficult. Gardner would always get his punches off first, leaving Olajide standing flat-footed and out of range to punch.

The best round of the fight came in the 11th, when Olajide threw a quick left hook followed by a short right hand that stunned Gardner momentarily for the first time in the contest.

Referee Toby Gibson (USA) kept the fight between the two native Canadians as clean as possible, even though Olajide almost threw Gardner over his shoulder on two occasions when they were in a clinch.

From start to finish, the rounds were hard to score. C.J. Ross (USA) scored it 115-113 to Gardner, Glenn Trowbridge (USA) scored it 117-112 for Gardner, and Robert Hoyle (USA) scored it a draw at 114-114, making Gardner the majority decision winner. THE RING scored the fight 114-114.

Gardner, 18-1 (7), added a good name to his resume, but this fight with Olajide, 20-2 (17), is definitely not one that will help either boxer earn TV dates.

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TRILOGY FOR THE AGES

Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales have given us a boxing trilogy for the ages, right up there with Ali-Frazier. I am also really pleased Barrera won the series. What an amazingly strong will he showed to come back from the devastating loss to Manny Pacquiao to conquer arch-rival Morales. I think Barrera has shown true greatness and as such he should be rewarded with both Fighter of the Year and Comeback of the Year honors. And after he defeats Pacquiao in a rematch next year, Barrera may well be on his way to surpassing the legendary Julio Cesar Chavez as Mexico's greatest ever fighter!

JAMES SLATER
York, England

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Marco Antonio Barrera jolts hated rival Erik Morales en route to a majority decision in their third bout. James Slater writes to praise the outstanding contest, while fellow reader Tony Hung lobbies for Barrera to win a trio of year-end awards.

ANOTHER VOTE FOR BARRERA

I hope THE RING selects Marco Antonio Barrera as Fighter of the Year. He's never won before, but I think he deserves it for what he's accomplished in 2004. Also, as Barrera was considered over the hill entering '04, he's certainly earned Comeback of the Year, and his rubber match victory over Erik Morales was definitely Fight of the Year.

TONY HUNG
Newbury Park, CA

PHOTO BY GREGG MARNANE

Super middleweight Scott Pemberton snaps James Crawford's head back with a long right hand prior to stopping him in the third round. Reader Ed Chupak strongly believes that the always entertaining "Sandman" deserves a crack at a major belt.

DECAPITATING DELIVERY

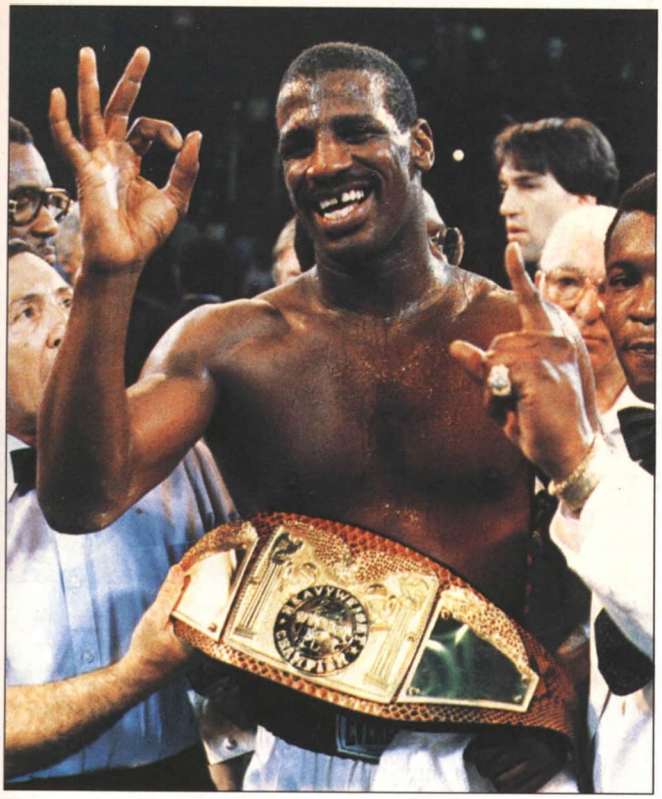
I have never seen a man get hit harder than when Samuel Peter caught Jeremy Williams with the left hook that knocked him cold.

I half expected Williams' head to roll across the ring like in that beer commercial.

JEFF BOLLINGER
schlup@earthlink.net

SANDMAN DESERVES A SHOT

As we head into 2005, can we please help to secure two things for Scott Pemberton? First, a top-10 rating in THE RING, and then a major title shot.



Reader David Magnusson believes Hall of Famer Michael Spinks, pictured after disposing of Gerry Cooney in 1987, would have been too much for a prime Roy Jones. In a 15-round fight, according to Magnusson, Spinks would have stopped Jones in the championship rounds.

"The Sandman" is not only one of the nicest guys you'll find in a sport marred by thugs and white-collar criminals, he is a hungry, talented, super-entertaining fighter who deserves a high-profile, championship shot.

Pemberton is a television-friendly warrior with a 29-3-1 (24) record, and let's not forget that he was involved in one of the five best fights of '04, his rematch TKO of the rugged Omar Sheika last January. The 168-pound division desperately needs an infusion of entertainment and quality, and Pemberton provides more than enough of both.

ED CHUPAK
Rochelle Park, NJ

QUALITY COMPARISION

I thoroughly enjoyed the Winter 2005 edition of THE RING in which Senior Writer William Dettloff posed the interesting premise as to whether or not the middleweight superstars of the 1980s would have beaten the middleweight superstars of today ("Middleweight Deja Vu: Is It The 1980s All Over Again?"). However, what really caught my attention was Jeff Ryan's article "If He Never Fights Again: What Is Roy Jones' Legacy?" Ryan wrote that Jones "retired two bouts too late to convince us that he'd have found a way to have beaten Archie Moore, Bob Foster, and Billy Conn—let alone Lennox Lewis."

So let's keep in the spirit of this issue and compare the light heavyweight champion of the '80s with Jones: Michael Spinks would have popped that jab into Jones' face until Jones got bold enough to try to get inside. Then Spinks would have dropped his right hand flush into Jones' face. Moreover, in a 15-round title bout, Spinks would take Jones out in the 13th. In fact, I think that Dwight Muhammad Qawi would also have given Jones all he could handle. Jones, like Mike Tyson, was very good, but not great. A legend? I sincerely doubt it!

DAVID MAGNUSSON
Hialeah, FL

COME BACK, LENNOX

After Vitali Klitschko beat Danny Williams, Lennox Lewis said that many people miss him and want him to come back. Let me just say that I, like many others out there, do indeed want Lewis to return, but not because we miss him. We just want to see him get knocked out. Lennox, why not give Vitali a well-deserved rematch? Remember, you retired, so you're a quitter!

IVAN MONTIEL
Toronto, Ontario

BACK TO THE FUTURE

After reading Nigel Collins' "Ringside" editorial in the Winter 2005 issue about THE RING's championship policy, for the first time in a long time I had the feeling that the sport of boxing was going to return to its former greatness. Looking at THE RING ratings, I noticed that although there were many championship vacancies in the lower weight divisions, the major weight classes are all headed by fighters who just about anybody who follows the game has to admit are legitimate world champions. True, it's not quite the good old days yet, because I still think that 17 weight classes is about six too many. But it sure is a breath of fresh air. The late, great Nat Fleischer would be very proud of you guys. Congratulations.

TEDDY MANN
Bayville, NJ ■

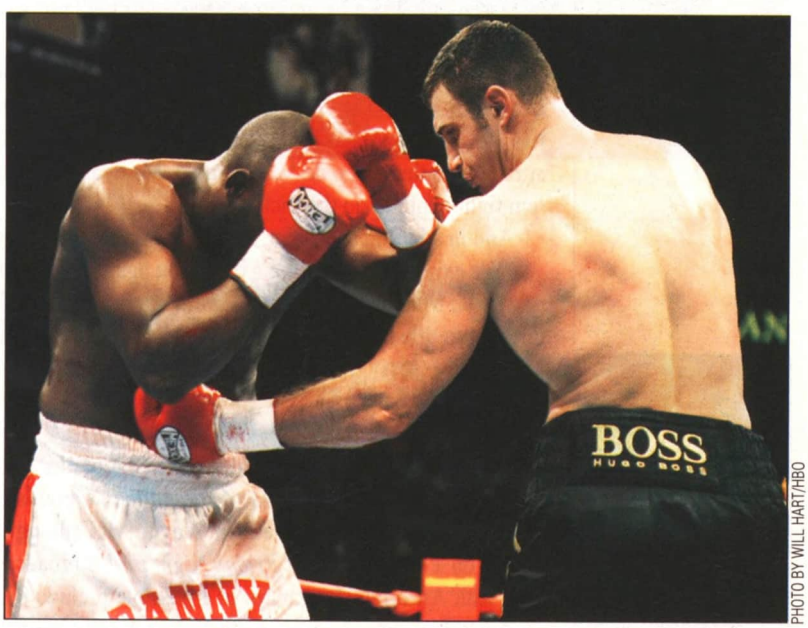


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Heavyweight champion Vitali Klitschko digs a left to Danny Williams' belly. Reader Ivan Montiel wants Lennox Lewis to come out of retirement for a rematch with "Dr. Iron Fist," who stopped Williams in the eighth round to tally his first defense.

LOOKING AHEAD

By Eric Raskin

SATURDAY NIGHT'S MORE THAN ALL RIGHT

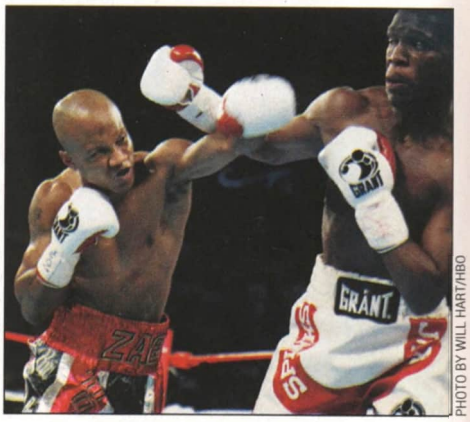


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

A Spinks-Judah rematch kicks off Showtime's '05 campaign

Year Two of Showtime's first-Saturday-of-every-month approach to boxing is about to begin, and **Jay Larkin**, executive producer of the pay-cable network's boxing programming, couldn't be more excited. Despite many of his best-laid plans for 2004 being dashed by injuries, and despite his pals at HBO boxing stepping on his toes with counter-programming in two of the last three months of the year, he's thrilled with the way everything's working out and with the potential for Showtime boxing in '05.

"The new schedule has proven a very strong success for us," Larkin said in December. "Our ratings are higher than they've ever been. Obviously, our fans have gotten the message; they know the first Saturday of the month is fight night, and they're tuning in. And the media has gotten the message also, and that's helped the fans to be aware.

"As for HBO scheduling boxing against our boxing, I'm not surprised. I am disappointed, but I'm not surprised. The thing is, HBO no longer has the ability to claim innocence or ignorance. I've never had a problem with competition. My problem is with them pretending to be ignorant that they were doing it, while they were diluting what little audience there is for boxing. They have every right to put boxing up against us, but it's not good for business. They know we're going on the first Saturday of every month. There are three other Saturdays of every month that are unencumbered."

As for those Saturdays in the first half of '05 that *aren't* unencumbered, Larkin has high hopes. He already has a welterweight championship rematch between **Cory Spinks** and **Zab Judah** signed for February 5, and there are two even bigger world title fights he's optimistic about for April and May.

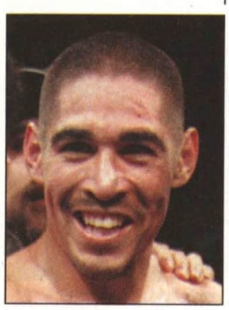
On April 2, even though it would go up against the NCAA basketball Final Four (apparently March Madness isn't restricted to March this year), Showtime is hoping to broadcast **Kostya Tszyu** vs. **Ricky Hatton**—live from Manchester, England, at about 3 or 4 a.m. local time. Larkin would have preferred the fight in March, but Tszyu, wanting to relax with his family over the holiday season, doesn't think he can be ready that soon. But as of press time, both sides were working hard to make a deal for the April date.

And on May 7, Showtime is shooting for a world lightweight title fight between **Jose Luis Castillo** and **Diego Corrales**. The Boxing Writers Association of America is planning to hold its annual awards dinner in Las Vegas that weekend, so Larkin is aiming to make a fight worthy of all the extra media in town that's also attractive to the Cinco de Mayo crowd. Mexican Castillo against Mexican-American Corrales in a virtual pick-'em fight ought to do the trick.

And in addition to all that, Larkin has one more wild card he's hoping to throw in the first half of '05.

"We expect that we'll see **Mr. Tyson** again at some point," Larkin noted.

If Iron Mike can take a break from jumping on cars long enough to train for another comeback, Tyson and three RING title fights would indeed make this a huge first half of the year for Showtime.



Margarito: Building toward Cintron match

LISTEN UP

Continuing with its successful experiment of airing live boxing on *The Best Damn Sports Show Period*, Fox Sports Net was considering as of press time a February 10 junior featherweight bout between division leader **Oscar Larios** and popular veteran **Wayne McCullough** … We told you last issue that **Kermit Cintron** would appear on a special ESPN2 *Friday Night Fights* broadcast on February 18. Now it's looking like he'll share the card with **Antonio Margarito**, in a possible prelude to a sensational welterweight showdown later in the year … Australian super middleweight **Danny Green** has been made to wait quite a while for another alphabet title shot since getting screwed against **Markus Beyer** back in August '03. Green's wait should end soon, as he's expected to get the next crack at Beyer, sometime in the first few months of the new year. ■

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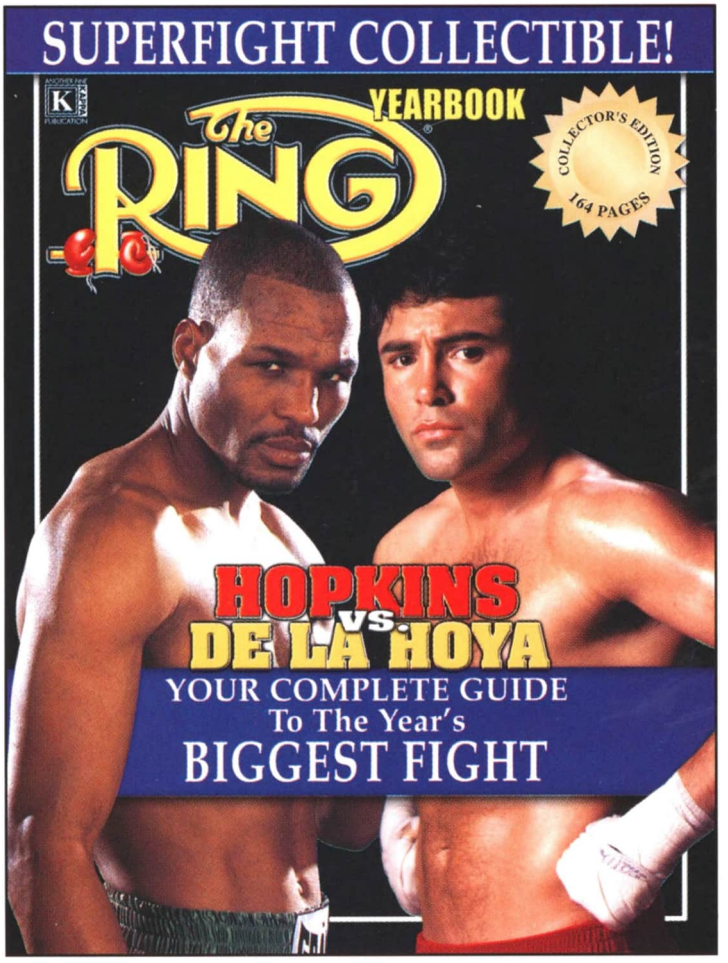

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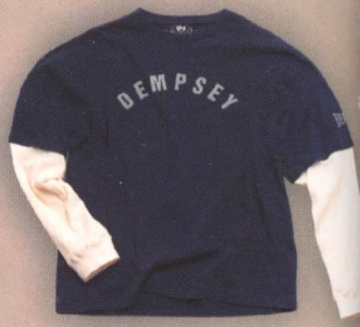

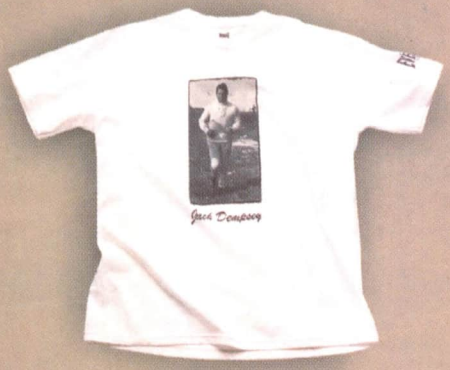

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